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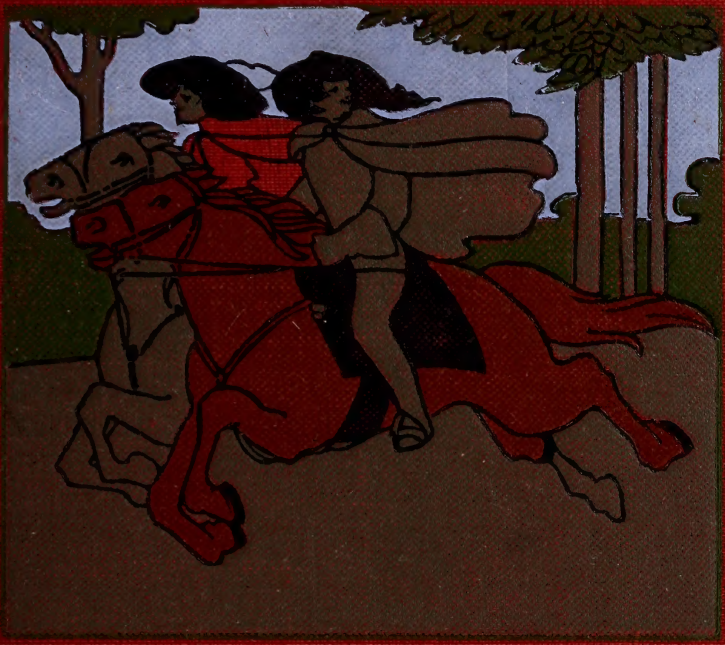

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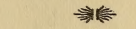

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"AT LAST A FEW LINES WERE ACCOMPLISHED."

(*See page 194.*)

CAPTAIN LOVE

The History of a Most Romantic Event in the Life of an English Gentleman During the Reign of His Majesty George the First. Containing Incidents of Courtship and Danger as Related in the Chronicles of the Period and Now Set Down in Print

By

THEODORE ROBERTS

Author of "Red Feathers," "Brothers of Peril," "Hemming the Adventurer," etc.

Illustrated by

LOUIS D. GOWING

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TO

E. W. R.

AND

E. R. MacD.

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CAPTAIN LOVE

CHAPTER I

ON THE HIGHWAY

At about the fall of dusk of a rare June evening, in a country of bosky woodlands and fat meadows, a travelling carriage rolled, with sedate celerity, along the highway. The vehicle was large and well appointed, with fine arms emblazoned on the doors, four portmanteaus in the rumble with the guard and four horses in the harness. The postilions and the fellow behind were in liveries of buff and blue, and each wore that air of massive calm which proclaims a trusted servant of the great. Inside the carriage sat two gentlemen at their ease, talking with animation, laughing now and then, and honestly enjoying the fading landscape and the clean, fragrant air that blew through the lowered windows. Their talk was as the talk of old and tested friends, comfortable, unforced and sincere.

The elder of the two gentlemen in the carriage

looked to be of about forty years of age. Though he was of no uncommon bigness for an Englishman, there was that in the bearing of chest and shoulders suggestive of great strength. His complexion, by its dusky tint and innumerable fine wrinkles, told of exposure to alien suns; and by the level regard of his eyes and the set of his jaws, the dullest fool would have known him a commander of men. Courage, manliness and a zest for adventure were marked honestly upon him; and somewhere about the eyes and mouth was a play of tenderness that told of a gentle heart under that alert and tempered exterior. He showed no points of lofty genius; but that he was of the salt of the earth a discerning stranger would acknowledge at a glance.

The younger of the two gentlemen was taller, handsomer, and of a slighter build than his companion. His face wore an air of gentle melancholy when in repose, but his smile was quick and whimsical and set his dark eyes gleaming. His long, claret-coloured coat was more richly laced than his companion's; his slim hands were elegantly gloved and — for such was the taste of the day — a delicate perfume exhaled from the frills of his shirt and the laces at his wrists. In his cheeks was some-

thing of the pallor of the student and his voice, even when raised in laughter, was softly modulated and clear as a bell.

"Old London is the pick of the world," said the elder of the two travellers. "I've drunk my liquor in many cities, Harry, but nowhere have I caught the taste and the comfort of it as in this same old town to which we are now rolling along. Give me an English inn, lad, and that in the thick of London, and the devil may have all the foreign places, and welcome."

"And yet those foreign places are not to be lightly considered," replied the other. "Three or four such come very pleasantly to my mind, even at this moment."

"Like enough, like enough," cried his companion; "but do not forget that you saw them as a rich traveller, rolling from town to town like a prince, while I, sight-seeing and looking for rest between campaigns, was of but little more consequence than a private soldier. But in the London taverns I know of — not the highest, mind you, but the most comfortable — a poor devil of a captain is as good as a duke, so long as he has the coin on the table and a voice with which to make himself heard."

The other, sunk in reverie, made no reply to this praise of London taverns. His quick spirit had passed back to the north, and the wounds in his young heart were bleeding again. The soldier, noting and understanding, set himself to lift the mood.

"I can scarce believe this to be your first trip to London," he said. "You have the best air already, lad, if I've ever seen it. Many a dandy who has spent years in the old town would give a plump fortune for your grace of manner. Manners is the cry nowadays, and t'hell with the morals! The higher you climb, the lower you go, I've heard it said."

"Damn their morals!" exclaimed the other. Then, smiling, "Might it not be," he asked, "that Paris and the cities of Europe, the halls of Oxford and the training of my parents, are as fit polishers for a gentleman's manners as the courts and coffee-houses of London?"

"You are right there," replied the soldier, "but you do not catch the nicest shade of my meaning. You are not only what no child of your noble father and lovely mother could help being — an aristocrat, a scholar, and a sportsman — but, as surely as you are all these and a poet beside, you

are a type of the most select and most modern London dandy. Harry, the thing is a chance gift of the gods and has but little to do with your travels, your education, or your imposing ancestry."

Again the gentleman addressed as Harry smiled; but now with a touch of indulgence.

"Jack, you are a wonderful fellow," he said. "Not content with winning medals and scars in half the kingdoms of Europe you must prod into my origin — which, Heaven knows, is plain as a pike-staff — until you find that I am begotten of the gods, polished by inspiration and educated by fate — with no credit at all for the wise doctors at Oxford. Jack, I have hitherto looked upon you as nothing but a hearty friend and a dashing soldier; but now, I fear me, you'll be writing a book."

For a moment Jack looked puzzled. Then he laughed doubtfully. "You're right, Harry; an humble friend I am, and a battered soldier, God knows," he said. "It's the wine we drunk at luncheon that's making an Oriental philosopher of me — and a devilish silly flatterer to boot. If you prove but half as witty as your mother and half as brave as your father, then I'll expect great things of you in London Town."

"We'll expect some rare sport, whatever I

prove," replied Harry. "How goes that song, Jack?"

"Which song?" inquired the honest soldier.

For answer, Harry hummed the opening bars of a tune familiar to his companion.

"Ah, now I have it," he cried. "I invented it this very morning, in bed at The Royal Oak. Stand ready, Jack, to support the chorus."

In an expressive tenor, he sang: —

"Nancy's brow is white as snow.
Nancy's lips are cherries.
Nancy's little teeth, arow,
Gleam like candle-berries.
Here's a health to Nancy, then —
Our Queen with eyes o' brown —
For she'll be wed to Parson, Jack.
E'er we get back from town.

"Rolling up to London Town,
Merry boys together!
Never think of what's to pay —
Never mind the weather!

"M'Lady's brow is white as milk;
Her Grace's teeth are coral;
The marchioness is robed in silk;
The countess points a moral.
So here's to all the ladies, Jack,
With eyes of blue or brown —
For we'll be wed to some one, Jack,
E'er we get back from town.

"Rolling up to London Town,
Merry boys together!
Never think of what's to pay —
Never mind the weather!"

The soldier, sitting very erect, lent a ringing bass to the chorus. The postilions grinned as they heard it. The fellow behind rapped out the air on the stock of his musket and hummed it deep in his throat. Harry struck up another verse: —

"Sweet, your name I do not know —
Queen of London village.
I'll lay siege to brows of snow
And take your heart by pillage!
Tell me — Are your eyes of blue,
Black, or merry brown?
Tell me — Will you love me true,
Queen of London Town?

"Rolling up to London, Jack,
Merry boys together!
Never reck if we'll get back!
Never mind the weather!"

"Very good. Very good indeed," remarked the soldier. "A deal better, I swear, than the verses of many a London poet. But I take exception, my dear Harry, to the alteration in the chorus."

"I did that on the spur of the moment," replied Harry.

"And I have an objection to make to the senti-

ment of your song," said Jack. "I, for one, am not going up to town to find a wife — Heaven forbid! A soft military command is what I have in my mind's eye. After twenty-two years of the knocks of a soldier's life I am now looking out for some of the nuts."

"And you deserve them, my dear fellow," said the other.

"As for this queen of London Town," continued the soldier, ignoring his friend's remark — "be sure she is queen of your heart, as well. It's a big town and a bad one, lad, with many a black heart behind white breasts and many a false tongue behind those red lips of which we sang. Take a soldier's word for it, my noble friend — a sure sword, though of little comfort in days of peace, is a safer mate for a young man than a ravishing beauty."

Harry's smile was grim as he laid a hand on his friend's knee. "Do you expect me to admit, even to you, that I've learned a lesson?" he asked. Then — "You take my song too literally — and I do believe you have inherited a taste for preaching."

"If I preach," replied the soldier, "I assure you the taste for it is not inherited. My father, worthy, reverend and beloved man, depends on a dog-eared

"THE FOOTMAN'S MUSKET BELLOWED OVERHEAD."

volume of Bishop Maypole's 'Reflections' for his sermons — unless he has changed mightily during my absence. He carries the book into the pulpit with him — for who's to gainsay him in Dodwater? — and reads his chapter openly and honestly."

At that moment the coach drew to a standstill and one of the postilions dismounted and lit the lamps. Then the journey was continued at a lively pace.

"Another hour, at this rate, will bring us to a decent tavern, if my memory serves me," remarked the soldier.

The words had scarcely died on his lips before a pistol shot rang above the rolling of the wheels and the pounding of the hoofs. The vehicle lurched, and stopped short so suddenly that both gentlemen were thrown violently forward on to their hands and knees. The footman's musket bellowed overhead. Another pistol shot spoke and was followed close by a scream of agony. Curses were shouted, in tones of dismay and exultation; and over went the fine carriage into the ditch, amid a rending of harness and a clattering of gear.

CHAPTER II

THE NAMELESS GENTLEMAN

THE tenant of Nullwood Lower Farm, William Holt by name, entered the kitchen of the farm-house with heavy tread. His whole broad face glowed moistly through the dispersed sweat of his brow. A few dried blooms of early clover and a long straw of timothy-grass clung to his woollen stockings. His wife, who stood by the door of the bake-oven, turned sharply at his entrance.

"Not so heavy!" she cried. "Lord-a-mercy, ye stump like a fatted ox!"

"Fiddle-de-dee, woman! I walks like an honest farmer," retorted Holt. "D'ye look to find a gentleman at every turn of your silly old head?" he added.

At that moment a girl entered from an inner room. Her rustic charms were heightened by a glow in her cheeks and a fine radiance in her eyes.

"He axed me where he was," she whispered. "And oh, he did look at me real sensible."

With an exclamation of satisfaction, the farmer started towards the door by which his daughter had just entered the kitchen. His good dame cried after him that his face needed washing and his manners mending; but he held on his way and entered the shaded chamber on the toes of his great boots.

In a tumbled bed in a corner lay a young man. His face was pale and thin, but of a high distinction of feature. Lip and chin were covered with the down of a youthful beard. But his eyes were clear and sane. He smiled gently in reply to his host's respectful salutation.

"And now, young gentleman," said the farmer, "I wants to know what your name may be an' where ye comes from. For two weeks come Saturday, me wife an' darter has tended ye like one of our own blood — beggin' your Honour's pardon for sayin' so — an' now we'd like to know just who ye may be."

The sick man stared at the yeoman with puzzled eyes. "You ask me who I am," he said — "well, to tell the truth, I do not seem to know."

The farmer scratched his head and shuffled on his feet. "Dang they foot-pads an' dang they fevers," he muttered. "What the one begins t'other finishes

— an' not a surgeon to bleed ye this side o' Taverton," he added.

The sick man watched him keenly; and now, very feebly, he spoke again. Low as his voice was, it trembled with eagerness.

"You talk of fever and foot-pads," he said. "You say that your wife and daughter have nursed me for two weeks come Saturday — and still you ask me who I am and where I come from. I think it is for you to answer questions, my good friend."

"Ax away," retorted the rustic, smiling broadly.

"Then how the devil do I happen to be in bed in a farmhouse chamber?" asked the other.

"How?" cried Holt. "Why, dang it, my gentleman, baint a farmer's bed soft enough for your lordship?"

At that moment the girl opened the door and entered the room. "Dad," said she, "be that the way to talk to the gentleman — an' him sick. Ye'll have him ravin' an' rollin' again if ye shouts so loud. Leave him be! Leave him be!"

Without more ado she pushed her offending parent from the room and closed the door on his heels. Then, going over to the bedside she fed the invalid with broth from a great bowl. He sipped

from the pewter spoon like a child. Presently he raised his fine eyes to the maiden's.

"You will think me very foolish," he said; "but will you kindly tell me my name."

"Oh, sir," she cried, "I do not know your name. But how gladly would I help you if I could."

For a little while he lay with his eyes closed and his brows wrinkled.

"Lord, I can remember nothing," he exclaimed, suddenly.

"Sir, you must lay quiet. You must rest your mind — else all our trouble will count for nought," whispered the girl.

For answer the sick man, looking at her steadily but unseeingly, chanted: —

"Sweet, your name I do not know —
Queen of London village.
I'll lay siege to brows of snow —
Take your heart by pillage.
Tell me, are your eyes of blue,
Black, or merry brown?
Tell me — will you love me true,
Queen of London Town?"

"Lor, sir," cried the girl, "what be ye about now? Your Honour have sung that song a score o' times, an' talked an' talked about it."

"And what else did I talk about?" he asked, leaning sidewise on his pillow.

"Ye called me Jack — many's the time ye called me so," said the girl. "An' ye talked about Lunnon — about me an' you — Jack an' you, your Honour — a-goin' to Lunnon. An' ye cried out about the queen; an' oncet ye spoke of yer dad, — an' oncet — "

"Of my father?" inquired the invalid — "Then surely I said his name? Surely, else how would you know of whom I spoke?"

The girl began to weep, and shook her head.

"Nay, sir, ye gave him no name," she sobbed. "The best father in the country — ay, the best in England — that be what ye said, sir; an' when ye first opened your eyes ye called dad 'Julia.'"

When the young man awoke next morning he felt stronger. For an hour or two he lay quiet, trying and trying to grasp some thread out of that past which his brain had let slip. The incidents of the previous day — the farmer's visit, and his talk with the girl — were clear enough; but beyond that his mind could lay hold of nothing save the words of a foolish song: —

> "Sweet, your name I do not know —
> Queen of London village."

"If I but knew my own it would be more to the purpose," he murmured.

A shaft of sunlight was streaming across his bed, from the deep-set lattice, when the farmer's daughter at last entered with his breakfast of gruel. He ate eagerly, cleaning the bowl to the last drop.

"And now," he said, "I should like to know the cause of my sickness. Will you tell it me, my lass?"

Nothing loath, the girl put by the bowl, drew a stool to the bedside and told what she knew of how he chanced to become an inmate of Nullwood Lower Farm. And this was the way of it. Tom Pawn, a labourer, had come knocking at the farmhouse door at peep of day, with an awful story of foot-pads and murder in his mouth. At the word "foot-pads" the good yeoman had pulled the blankets about his ears; but, in a twinkling his wife had shot him on to the floor and urged him into a few of his most needful garments. After which he had followed Tom Pawn a matter of half a mile down the highway — and there, in the softly spreading lights of the summer dawn he had looked upon the great coach overturned in the ditch. The doors had been torn from their hinges, evidently as the quickest way of disposing of the arms

thereon. Five victims of the assault lay on the road. All were naked to the waist. Three of the dead men were proclaimed servitors by the quality and condition of their boots. The other two — gentlemen at a glance — had been stripped even to their feet. And one of these was seen to have a spark of life still aglow in him — and him the rustics had rolled in a smock and carried back to the farmhouse.

The invalid caught the girl's wrist in his thin fingers, as she finished her story.

" By God," he cried, " that outrage shall be paid for in blood. Nameless I may be, but I swear it on the oath of a gentleman. Those honest fellows in the muddy boots — ye gods, I feel it in my blood they were my servants. And the poor, dead gentleman? — who was he but my friend? Ay, my friend, though my memory holds nothing of him — not an echo of his voice — not a line of his face " — and with a gesture at once pathetic and menacing, the youth turned his face to the pillow and eased his grief with tears.

Thus the farmer and his wife found them — the sick man sobbing in the pillow and the simple girl blubbering beside the bed.

" Rip my innards," exclaimed Holt, " but here be

a merry company." The dame grasped her daughter by the shoulder and jerked her to her feet.

"Pack yoursel' out o' this, my lass. Churnin' be awaitin' on ye," she cried; and, with more strength than skill, propelled the maid from the room. The disturbance both aroused and calmed the gentleman in the bed.

"What is the meaning of this?" he inquired, discovering his face to his entertainers.

"Axin' yer pardon, sir," said the woman, "but this baint no time fer tears. Eye-water an' fever be friends, an' ye've had yer fill o' fever."

"An' what may be the trouble?" asked the farmer.

"I mourn my murdered friend and my murdered servants," replied the youth.

"Ay, your Honour," said the farmer, "an' what might their names be?"

"Nay, that I cannot tell you, my good fellow," answered the other. "My past lies in their graves."

Day by day the nameless gentleman recovered health and strength. Though every incident of his past life had been wiped from his memory, either by the blow on his head received from the highwayman, or by the fever, his brain was sane and capable as ever and the results of his old training had been

spared to him. In a Latin book, which some clerkly traveller had left at the farmhouse, he read with ease and delight.

In those days this fact in itself was sufficient to mark him as a person of quality. Farmer Holt made inquiries at several of the houses of the nearest gentry; but none of the aristocracy of that region missed either a friend or a relative.

One day in September the restless spirit of youth, and the desire to fare into the world and seek his lost name and identity, grew too strong for the nameless gentleman to withstand. He sought out the farmer, who was alone in his wheat-field.

"Master Holt," said he, "my heart bids me out to seek my lost place in the world. I may find it under my true name or under another; but find it I will. And then, my friend, a hundred golden pounds will be yours and the life-long protection of a powerful person."

The stout yeoman leaned on his scythe.

"Ye speak bravely," he said, "but what pledge have I that ye speak truth?"

"The word of a gentleman," replied the other.

"Of a nameless gentleman — of a penniless gentleman — of a gentleman picked naked out of a ditch," said the farmer.

"Fellow," cried the young man, "take care, lest you do yourself a hurt. Was it not the very richness of my clothing that caused my nakedness? Did you not see, with your own eyes, the marks on my fingers where rings had been? Mend your address, my good friend, or else the profit of your kindness may escape you."

"I ax yer pardon, sir," said the yeoman, who was easily cowed by the other's high spirit. "I meant to take no liberty with your Honour, I swear. An' maybe, sir, ye'll find your name an' your great friends in Lunnon."

"Then shall I not forget my honest friend of Nullwood Lower Farm," replied the youth. "Stap me, but I'll buy you the farm, man, and the dame and the lass gowns of silk," he added.

"Thank'ee kindly, sir," said the farmer. There was a twinkle in his dull eye. "An' don't forget, sir," he continued, "that ye be carryin' away with ye many a shillin's worth o' good cream, an' meat, an' ale an' many a night's good nursin'."

"The debt shall be honoured," replied the gentleman, with dignity.

Clad in ill fitting yeoman clothes, with an oak cudgel in his hand and a loaf of Dame Holt's bread in his pocket, the man bereft of memory and

worldly place set his feet bravely to the king's highway. The shadows lengthened across the fields and dusk stole out from the plantations of oak and pine; and something in the balmy air and fading lights stirred the ghosts of memories in the wayfarer's brain.

"My friend was beside me," he murmured — "and we sang as we rolled along. And the song abides with me; but, dear Lord, I cannot pierce the shadows to my comrade's face. Nameless, penniless, I go afoot to London, who started so grandly in a rocking coach."

Busied with such thoughts, and with vain attempts to awaken some nerve of the dead past, he tramped along until darkness closed down upon the landscape and faint stars twinkled overhead. Then, knowing that caution serves the poor as well as the rich on the king's highway — for a throat is as easily slit as a purse — he made a den for himself in the hedge-row and lay down to sleep. But his busy brain, harking back on a dead scent, kept him wide-eyed and restless.

Of a sudden the traveller's coursing wits were recalled to him by a shrill and shaken cry — the scream of a woman in terror. Quick as thought he darted from his retreat to the middle of the

wide road. Half-way down the slope which dipped London-wards before him shone the lanterns of a carriage. And again the scream of fear rang on the air. He sprang to the shadows along the ditch and ran noiselessly. The cudgel of oak swung in his hand, balanced to a nicety. The lust of battle sang in his head like the fumes of wine. The uncertain light of the stars showed him a small carriage, a pair of docile nags, a postilion with his craven face hidden in his arms, and a mounted man beside the coach with head and shoulders thrust inside. Leaping up, he gripped the robber by the belt, dragged him side-long from the saddle and cracked his head with the club of oak. The fellow sprawled and lay quiet. The post-boy sat up and applied his spurs; and amid feminine screams and masculine curses from within, and cries for more speed, the carriage dashed on its way.

The rescuer stood on the gray road and gazed after the bounding vehicle.

"I wonder is she old or young, a beauty or a shrew?" he murmured. He caught the highwayman's gray horse by the rein and made it fast to a thorn-tree. Then, bending down to his victim, he found the heart still moving and the breath fluttering.

"Now shall the robber be robbed," said he.

The highwayman's garments were new, and of superior stuffs and workmanship. The young man pulled them off, from hat to boots, and donned them himself. Thrusting a hand into a pocket of the coat that fitted him so fairly, he felt a little collection of coins and rings. On the saddle he discovered a leather bag stuffed with gold, and fine pistols in the holsters. He carried the senseless robber to the shelter of some bushes and covered him with the smock-frock and rustic garments which he himself had so lately worn. Then, mounting the gray horse, he rode on towards London.

He had not ridden more than a mile before he was suddenly joined by a shadowy horseman who issued, without warning, from the gloom of a thicket. The stranger rode up to his knee.

"Dennis, you fool," he cried, "where be the old knight's money-bag an' the young lady's trinkets?"

The gentleman did not turn his face; but his right hand unfastened the leather bag from where it was hooked beside his right holster.

"Here is the money," he said — and bestowed

the weight of it so viciously upon the other's crown that the fellow reeled in his saddle.

Thereupon the nameless gentleman touched spurs to his good gray horse and sped Londonwards at a gallop.

CHAPTER III

THE HOUSE ON THE HEATH

THE gallop of the gray horse soon shifted to a trot, and from that, again, to a walk; and the nameless gentleman, feeling that the immediate need of hurry was passed, did not apply the spur. The night was fine and still, and grayly lit with a myriad of small stars. The highway ran wide and pale between open heaths. Save for the measured striking of the gray's shoes on the road, and the creak of saddle-leather, the only sound was that of a dog's barking, somewhere in front and to the right. What with the blood-glow of the recent adventure, the stir of good horse-flesh between his knees, the charm of the night and the thought of the bag of gold, the young man felt a fine elation. He squared his shoulders and looked proudly around at the vague and haunting desert. He patted the neck of the gray, jingled the coins and trinkets in his borrowed pockets and, ignoring the dangers of the place and hour, began to sing. He

was not conscious of a knowledge of either the words or tune; but they came to his brain and tongue as required, with no apparent effort on his part. He sang it to an end, and then, thinking to try it again, was amazed to discover that he remembered not a word of it. "My head is playing me queer tricks," he murmured. In distress, and fallen completely from his mood of a moment before, he began to rack his brain for some memories of the past.

"A hint might lead to everything," he reflected. "Just a name, or the picture of a place, or the remembrance of a voice, and maybe all that I have lost will return to me. But are things to flash into my mind, only to slip away again like the song I sang a moment ago? God, that would drive me to madness. Nay, but I must unearth that ditty again, though it crack my skull."

So letting his horse continue to walk forward at its own pace, he set himself laboriously to refind the words and air of that sentimental song. Though the effort was untimely, it was heroic. The charm of the night and the open road called to him, and dangers beset him, like as not; and yet he sat slack in the saddle, with downcast eyes, and applied himself to the schooling of his wayward

mind. Other songs came to him — among them the rhymes concerning the queen of London Town — but he brushed them aside.

At last the gray horse stopped short.

"Hi, there, Barney, get down an' come inside. The drink is ready for you," cried a shaking and unpleasant voice. The nameless gentleman sat straight and looked about him. He was in a muddy yard, with low buildings in front and on one side. He slid his right hand to the butt of a pistol.

"Drink? By gad, that's the very word," he said; and without shifting his position he sang.

> "Drink to me only with thine eyes
> And I will pledge with mine."

A door shut violently and bolts were shot; but he finished the song.

"I'll not forget that again," he said at last. Greatly relieved, he gave all his attention to a swift survey of his surroundings.

"A dirty hole," he thought, "and a nest of rogues, I'll swear. Well, as I am learning the ways of the world, I'll look into it, if possible."

He reined the gray close to the building, which showed not so much as a chink of light and was now silent as the grave, and clattered a stirrup-iron against the door.

"Now I am ready for that drink," he shouted.

A window opened above his head, with slow and furtive creakings. He touched a spur to the gray and wheeled aside.

"Who comes to my poor house at this ungodly hour and demands drink?" asked the same harsh voice that had accosted him before.

"A traveller who is both athirst and weary," he answered, keeping a sharp eye on the direction of the window.

"That's a fine horse you are sitting on," remarked the unseen guardian of the house.

"It is a good horse," replied the gentleman.

At that moment a lighted candle appeared in the window, as if suddenly uncovered, and the face and shoulders of a most repulsive-looking old woman were disclosed to the horseman's view.

"Come closer, that I may see your face," she said, leaning forward from the casement.

"If you can tell me who I am, I shall be glad to hear it," replied the gentleman, and at the same time he removed his hat and rode into the candlelight.

The hag studied his face without any light of recognition in her bright and evil eyes; but at sight

of his clothing and mount a low gasp escaped her. But in a moment she was smiling.

"You are a stranger to these parts, sir, an' that's true enough," she said. "This poor house is not often honoured by gentry like you. The great travellers go posting by, with never a thought for poor honest old Meg, who has kept this decent place for fifty years. I'll wake the gaffer, to stable your fine charger, sir, an' I'll lay out a bottle of claret, an' a cold joint, an' air the best bed for you. So get down, sir, get down."

"Nay, dame, I'll stable the nag myself," replied the traveller.

He found the hovel that served for a stable, and three horses already in it. The place was in complete darkness, but he felt his way about and learned, by cautious feeling, that all the horses were saddled and bridled.

"This place is a highwayman's retreat," he decided, and discretion urged him to mount and gallop away. But the spirit of daring, which burned in him like a flame, would not hear of so tame a course. In the manger of an unoccupied stall he found a box of grain and an armful of hay. These he promptly lifted, and still leading the gray, he left the hovel and advanced upon the open heath.

Within a hundred yards of the building he came to a small tree and a clump of bushes, and here he tied his steed, loosened its girths, and fed it. Then, very quietly, he got the other horses and fastened them in the same place.

"So far, so good," he remarked to himself, and after removing two primed pistols from the holsters of a saddle and placing them in his pockets, he returned to the house and knocked on the door.

The room was wide and low, and imperfectly lighted by two tallow candles on the table and a lanthorn hanging by the chimney. Despite the saddled nags outside, the room showed no signs of the presence of guests. The old woman stood by the table, on which were displayed a bottle, a platter, half a loaf and an unattractive fragment of cold mutton. Beside the chimney sat a very ancient man, gazing at the ashes on the hearth and nodding foolishly. He wore a shawl about his bent shoulders, a red woollen night-cap on his uneasy head, and his thin legs were bare.

"You do a lively business, dame," remarked the traveller, as his glance searched every shadowed corner of the room. "With four horses in the stable, and four hungry and thirsty men inside,

you must make a pot of gold in the run of a year."

"Not so, your Honour," replied the hag, eying him sharply. "The house is as empty as the gaffer's head, an' the three nags you saw in the stable were put there but an hour ago by three strange gentlemen who, I'll swear, are up to some devilment or other. They were London gentry, I take it, and very frisky with liquor. They went running off across the heath like schoolboys, without so much as tellin' me nor the gaffer their names, nor when they'd be back for their horses."

The traveller seated himself on a stool near the table, with one shoulder to the old woman, one to the old man, and his face to a ladder which led from a corner of the room to the loft above.

"Men act very queerly, when in liquor," he said, pretending to believe the hag's feeble lie. "For my own part, I never drink except when I am flat on my back, in bed," he continued, pleasantly. "It's a trick I learned in the Low Countries, when I was soldiering there. Then the liquor lies quiet, midway between your head and your feet, and is comfortably digested by reveille. But when a man drinks standing, the stuff goes to his feet, and gets shaken about, and soon the bubbles are rising and

bursting in his head, and making him act like the gentlemen who left their nags in your stable."

The woman eyed him suspiciously, but his face was as innocent as a child's. The old man turned from his contemplation of the cold ashes on the hearth.

"Rip my innards," he piped.

The traveller was busy with the bread and mutton and paid no heed to his host's exclamation.

"Of all the whoppers I ever did hear — an' I've heard a-plenty."

"Don't you begin a-talkin'. You shut your mouth," snapped the woman.

"Nay, now, Sue," objected the old fellow.

"Nay, now, wouldn't you let me join in a social talk. I'll let nothin' slip, girl, that'll get you an' the gang into trouble."

The woman skipped across the room and fairly snarled a word in his ear. Whatever the word was, it reduced him immediately to his former silence and foolish contemplation of the hearth.

"Bill has been a good husband to me," she said, returning to the table, "but his head isn't right, an' gets more an' more wrong every day, an' full of all manner of queer notions. He's been a soldier too, has Bill, and fought for his king an' country,

like your Honour. But you haven't drunk your wine, sir. That's good wine, too, what I keep a few bottles of for gentry like yourself."

"I'll take it along to bed with me, dame — and two more like it, if you'll be so kind," said the traveller. He took a gold piece from his pocket and laid it on the table. "Two more bottles like this," he said, "and you can keep the silver. Hurry it along, dame, for I am ready for my bed."

The hag snatched the coin from the table, examined it closely and popped it into a bag at her girdle.

"I'll be back in two shakes," she said, and hastened from the room, closing the door behind her. The old man immediately turned in his seat and beckoned to the traveller, who, needing no second bidding, stepped noiselessly across to him.

"Don't you get into that bed," mumbled the gaffer. "Don't so much as touch it, for God's sake."

"What d'ye mean?" whispered the gentleman, with a break in his voice.

But the gaffer would say no more, and motioned him to return to his seat.

"This is buying experience at a high price," re-

flected the traveller. "This is worse than I expected, and cursed uncanny. The old woman is a devil, I do believe — and I'd give half my bagful of gold to be safe out of it. Lord, what a fool I was to thrust my head into this damnable hole."

But upon the return of the old woman with the two bottles of wine, he seemed as bland and unshaken as ever. With a smile and a bow, he relieved the hag of the bottles.

"Now, dame, I am ready for a good night's sleep," he said.

"I'll show your Honour to as fine a bed as there is in the country," she replied. "I always keep it clean and fresh, for such as you."

The gaffer stirred uneasily by the cold hearth. The dame took one of the candles from the table, and led the way down the full length of the room, to a door in the wall beside the ladder. The traveller, who had expected to be asked to ascend to the loft, with the chance of receiving a blow on the head as he popped it through, felt decidedly relieved. On the threshold he took the candle from the dame's hand, but cast an apprehensive glance around the interior before stepping within. What he saw was a fair-sized chamber, very neat and

clean, with one window, furniture consisting of a chair, a table, and a great bed with curtains of silk. It all looked innocent enough, Heaven knows.

"'Tis the chamber I keep for the quality," remarked the hag, following her guest's glance with an evil smile. "An earl has slept in that bed, an' a general officer, and two fashionables from London — an' they made no complaints."

"I am sure it is fit for a duke," replied the traveller.

"A duke? Is your Honour a duke?"

"No, dame, I am a poor soldier."

"Good night, colonel, an' sweet dreams to you."

"Good night, dame."

CHAPTER IV

A FACE AND A DREAM

THE nameless gentleman set his candle and wine on the table beside the bed, then returned to the door and cautiously shot the bolt. The words of the old man by the hearth had stirred him to uneasiness verging on fear, and to a sense of the danger of his position more keenly than had the three saddled horses in the stable and the sinister eyes and behaviour of the old woman. In the warning against the great bed was something that chilled his marrow. He was not afraid to take chances with the owners of the nags in the stable; but to suspect danger from a piece of furniture — that was the very devil. It came to his mind that, somewhere and sometime, he had heard tales of travellers vanishing suddenly from lonely inns; of strange and terrible contrivances set in wardrobes and bedsteads; of floors falling from under one's feet, and ceilings descending and smothering; of sweet potent drugs at one's nostrils and knives stab-

bing a man from his sleep and stabbing him back to a longer slumber. Such thoughts, in that still and dim-lit room, rasped his nerves and bedewed his body with the sweat of fear. With shaking and fumbling hands he removed his boots, and drew forth his pistols. He made a slow circuit of the chamber, searching the walls for a peep-hole or hidden door. Failing to discover anything of the kind, he crossed to the window. It was unbarred and unfastened, and opened low on the side of the tavern toward the stables. It possessed no inner fastenings by which it might be held against an attack from without. Even should the bed prove a safe resting-place, the owners of the horses in the stable would have but little trouble in dealing with the sleeper.

Dawn was growing, pale and gray, between the edge of the sky and the edge of the desolate heath. The nameless gentleman placed his boots and pistols on the floor, close to the window. Then, moving on tip-toe, he parted the curtains of the bed and gazed fearfully within. He could see nothing but the sheen of fine linen, and the bulking of white pillows at the head. A fragrance of sweet herbs stole across his face. With the greatest caution, he lifted the table and laid it in the middle of the bed;

"STRUCK HIS BEWILDERED PURSUER TO THE GROUND."

then returning to the window, he drew on his boots, recovered his pistols, and waited, keeping a sharp watch both within and without, and his ears as alert as his eyes.

He had stood so for ten minutes, perhaps, when a thin, clicking sound from the bed caught his attention. This was followed immediately by a sharp, metallic clang, a jarring underfoot and a loud splash in hidden depths beneath the floor. A brief silence followed, which was broken horribly by a peal of shrill and devilish laughter from somewhere in the interior of the house. The nameless traveller threw open the window, leapt out and ran at the top of his speed for the thicket in which he had left the four horses. He had not covered more than half the distance when the sound of hoofs reached his ears. Looking eastward, he saw a horseman spurring forward a jaded nag, as if to cut him off from his goal. He dashed on, reached the thicket, unfastened all the horses and mounted the gray. Slapping one of the other nags across the rump, he sent it plunging into the open, where it was greeted and missed by a charge from the belated highwayman's pistol. Setting spur to the gray, he galloped out, and struck his bewildered pursuer to the ground. Still at the charge, he bore

down upon that iniquitous tavern. A window flew open; but instead of the hag, he saw the pale, horror-stricken face of a girl. As he galloped past he kept his eyes upon her, wide with astonishment and admiration. In a moment the clay of the by-road was under his horse's feet, and he was speeding toward safety, and daylight, and the king's highway.

The nameless gentleman was weary, hungry and sleepy, but for all his physical discomfort he could not keep his mind from dwelling upon the pale, terror-stricken face at the tavern window. What was a young and beautiful woman doing in that den of thieves?

"Damn it, I'll find out," said he. "When I get more firmly established in the world," he added, remembering what an unpleasant night he had just passed through, and that, for all he knew, he had not a friend in the land.

"But here is a little friendship," he said, rapping the leathern bag of gold with his knuckles; and he fell to pondering on the value of money, and trying to remember something of his past experiences with it.

"My friend of Nullwood Lower Farm worked hard for a very little of it," he reflected. "I and

my lost friend were knocked on the head — and that was for our money and our rings, I'll swear. I overcame a robber, took his bag of gold, and experienced a very comfortable sensation at the touch of it. I bought wine from that devilish old hag with a piece of metal; and, for the lust of more of that metal, she sought to drop me into a tank of water beneath her accursed house. Gad, but this money is a strange thing, and a man seems to be in as great danger from having it as from lacking it."

These philosophical reflections, however, failed to keep his mind, for more than a few minutes, from the face he had espied at the window. Though it had gleamed upon his view for so brief a time — for five seconds perhaps, as his gray charged past — it remained bright and clear-cut to his inner vision. The expression of terror had deprived the pale features of nothing of their beauty.

"I wonder," he murmured, and then swore violently. "Such a thing could never be," he added, and drove the suspicion from him with another oath.

The sun was clear of the horizon when he entered a village on the outskirts of the great town. Here,

at a neat inn set beneath the shade of elms, he breakfasted at his ease and then retired to an honest bed in a bright, cool room above the fragrance and soft noises of a little garden. For a long time he lay in a half-doze, deliciously comfortable, his limbs extended at their full length and every tired muscle relaxed. The stirring of a little wind at the lattice, the droning of bees and the light movements of birds in the garden foliage and from somewhere in the village street the voices of old men, softened by distance, soothed his half-heedless ears. The sheets of the bed felt cool and smooth to his body, the very skin of which was tired. The adventures and terrors of the past night slipped from his brain, leaving it at peace.

In a sweet half-consciousness, he felt himself sinking into slumber as into a magic sea, from one bright depth to another. And, at last, it was as if fathoms of sleep, clear and alive like the waters of a tropic sea, were over him. Faces, at once strange and half-familiar, crowded about him. Presently he walked alone in a rose-garden, at about the time of the falling of dusk, and his heart was eager and glad. The path turned among the roses and clipped shrubberies and, following it, he came to a bench under an arbour of honeysuckles. And there, with

averted face, sat the object of his eager search. He knew that she was waiting for him; and so mad was his joy at finding her that the dusky garden seemed to waver, like a tide, in his vision. He paused for a moment, to steady himself, and the scent of the roses was sweet on the still air. He stooped and plucked one of the blooms; and then it came to him that the roses had been only in bud when he was last in the garden. As he stood, with the flower in his hand, the girl in the arbour turned her familiar, incomparable face to him.

"Is it — you?" she asked, scarce above a whisper.

For answer, he ran forward and knelt close to her, snatching one of her hands to his lips.

"I have waited here, night after night, and prayed that you would forgive me — and come back," she said.

He raised his head at that, and gazed at her face. "I could not stay away any longer," he said. "My heart brought me home to you."

"It is like a dream," she whispered. And then — "Perhaps it is a dream."

The woman, the arbour and the garden whirled away in blackness. He felt an ungentle hand on his shoulder and a voice bawling in his ear. He

flung out his arm, uttered a low cry, and opened his eyes upon the bright little room above the inn-garden. The landlord was stooping over him, shouting that 'twas past noon, and dinner spoiling. The nameless gentleman lay quiet for a second or two, staring wide-eyed at his bulky host, his soul longing back to the dusky garden of roses and his heart and mind still enthralled by the dream. Or was this the dream? — this and the adventurous night, the events of which came painfully back to his memory? He felt the linen sheets, between his fingers, and looked at the flood of noon sunshine on the floor. He sat up and poked at the landlord's vast waistcoat with an inquiring forefinger. No, these things were real.

"To the devil with you and your dinner," he cried, in sudden passion. "Out of here, you rogue, or I'll lay a whip on you for disturbing my sleep."

The big innkeeper drew back from the bed in injured amazement.

"What ails you?" he asked. "You told me to wake you at noon, an' have your nag ready, an' dinner on the table. I've done your bidding. I'm a man of substance, I am, an' 'ill not be cursed by every whipper-snapper who spends a shillin' at my house."

But the nameless gentleman heard not a word of that indignant and independent reply. His spirit was harking back — his mind was searching for some fragment of the lost dream, only the divine fragrance of which remained to him.

"By God, I have forgotten her face already," he exclaimed, in a shaking voice.

CHAPTER V

THE NAMELESS GENTLEMAN FINDS A NAME

For a week the nameless gentleman lived very quietly in London. On the eighth day, and about three hours past noon, he left the quiet house in which he lodged and took his way to the Strand. Would the lass of Nullwood Lower Farm have known this dandy for her unfortunate charge, I wonder? What miracles the tailors and barber had accomplished. He wore a light sword and carried a cane of the latest mode. From his three-cornered hat to his buckled shoes he was garbed in the richest materials and the nicest taste. The fine lace at his wrists almost hid his slender hands. On one finger he wore a signet ring which he had found among the coins in the highwayman's pocket. The design on the stone was a charger *trippant*. The motto read, "Expectans equito."

"Who can say that it is not my own ring and my own crest," he had said, when first considering it. "And the motto, 'Waiting, I ride,' surely suits

my uncommon case. It comes back to me. It is familiar."

He strolled along like one in a glorious dream. He met the eyes of other gentlemen attired as magnificently as himself. Ladies went by in their chairs; and he caught glimpses of a bewildering variety of faces. The noise and the colour rang around him like the music of a song; and, smiling a little, he murmured: —

> "Sweet, your name I do not know —
> Queen of London village."

Presently, on the heels of three other exquisites, he entered what he correctly surmised to be a place of public entertainment. It proved to be a no less fashionable resort than "Babcock's." With a fine assurance, he walked the length of the room and sat down at a table already occupied by a short, rotund gentleman in a lilac waistcoat. A servant approached and stood deferentially at attention.

"Cocoa," said the short gentleman.

"Cocoa," said the nameless gentleman.

The other eyed him with a near-sighted squint.

"There you are wise, sir," said he. "No one else in town serves that good beverage so desirably as does our excellent friend Babcock. But my own fellow has a fair hand at it."

Just then a third gallant seated himself at the table. His air suggested a curious blending of pride, affability and sadness. "How goes the great work, Percy?" he inquired.

"As fast as I can lay pen to paper," replied he of the lilac waistcoat.

"What? With no time given to research?"

"The whole matter is in my head, Sir John."

The gentleman who had put the questions indulged in a pinch of snuff and a smile of skepticism.

"My dear Percy," said he, "though your head is large, I doubt if it can hold the armorial bearings of all the gentlemen in England."

The conceited scribe tapped his forehead.

"I assure you they are all here," he said.

At this our nameless gentleman, in a very reckless spirit, extended the hand upon which he wore the signet.

"Five pounds, sir, that you fail to tell me my name," he said.

"Ha, my dear Percy!" exclaimed Sir John.

Percy examined the ring.

"This is yours?" he queried.

Our hero nodded assent.

"Then your name is Love," said the other.

The gentleman from Nullwood Lower Farm arose and bowed.

"Captain Love, at your service," said he, without a tremor in his voice; and he laid five gold coins on the table.

The others got to their feet and bowed in turn.

"Sir John Petre," said the compiler, indicating his companion with a wave of a fat hand.

"Mr. Percy Hyde," said Sir John.

The three resumed their seats and drew their chairs closer together. "A son of Sir William Love?" queried Hyde.

The alleged captain's wits bestirred themselves.

"No, I am of a younger branch," he replied. "My father is a country parson. I am but lately returned from the East. My name is Richard."

He was inwardly amazed at his own power of invention; but nothing of the amazement showed in his face.

"Of what regiment, Captain?" inquired Sir John Petre.

"Of the Sultan of Turkey's Household Guards," replied Captain Love, with a rare smile.

"Lord, a Turk!" exclaimed Mr. Hyde, and swallowed his cocoa.

"You do not look like a Turk," he added.

"You've not seen me in my turban and — and slippers," said the captain.

"In that costume — with, I presume, a few additional garments in between" — said the baronet, "you would take the town by storm."

"By Heaven," cried the captain, with a fine show of heat, "no man alive shall ever again see me dressed like a Turk — my exile is at an end."

"And how long do you intend to remain in town?" asked Mr. Hyde.

"Until I tire of it," replied the other, good naturedly; but with a quick lifting of the brows that did not escape the observant eyes of Sir John.

"Then we'll see that you do not tire of it within a year," said Sir John Petre, kindly.

His liking for this son of a parson — this adventurer out of the Orient — was as strong as it was sudden.

Mr. Hyde nodded.

"If Sir John says you'll not tire of it, then spit my vitals if you do," said he, "for there's not a beauty nor a wit in the town to whom he cannot open you the door."

"And Percy will give you their pedigrees," said Sir John.

"I cannot promise you that," retorted Mr. Hyde, with a shrewd wink.

"Tut, tut," exclaimed the baronet, with a shade of displeasure in his fine face.

Hyde turned to their new acquaintance.

"We have done our duty by this excellent but uninspiring drink," said he, "and now I suggest that we step up-stairs."

"Very good," said the captain, without the least idea of what stepping up-stairs might lead to.

On the second floor of "Babcock's" were eight rooms. These were devoted to playing-cards and dice, the weapons of that ancient goddess, Chance.

"Here is the devil's own den," said Sir John, in the captain's ear.

"Shall we play or look on?" asked Mr. Hyde.

"Why," said Captain Love, "I have nothing against the dice."

Sir John Petre smiled pensively.

"You are young, my friend, and fresh from Turkey," he said. "But let us first see how Buckley is faring to-day."

They followed him over to a table at which two men were seated. Lord Buckley was a large man with an imposing presence and a bloated face. His companion was younger, smaller, and pale as death.

He got up from his chair on the approach of the three.

"Finished, by God," he muttered, and left the room without a word of farewell to the earl.

Six hours later, Sir John Petre and Captain Love stepped out of "Babcock's." A fog had come in with the night and the street was like a pit.

"I believe we have Buckley's winnings for a week in our pockets," said Sir John. "So we'll let my two fellows here walk behind us, and this lad with the link lead the way."

"The earl did not lose like a gentleman," said Love.

"Gentleman!" cried Petre. "My friend, he has never done anything like a gentleman in all his ugly life."

They walked for a few minutes in silence. The captain leaned to his companion.

"You are wonderfully good to take me home to supper — and only on Mr. Hyde's word as to my respectability."

"And your word, Dick, which is more to me than Mr. Hyde's," replied the baronet.

The captain felt a twinge, and his heart prompted him to make a true statement of his position to his new friend. But his brain argued that he was

honest in naming himself a gentleman, and that he who plays a game with Fate must let no advantage slip. As to "Love" — why, a man must have a name; and if this were not the true name, ten to one his was a greater. But the fiction of the Sultan's body-guard stuck in his crop. It was an inartistic lie, at best, and he blushed to think of having befooled Sir John with so silly a tale.

CHAPTER VI

SIR JOHN'S TOWN ESTABLISHMENT

SIR JOHN PETRE lived in a rented house in a street off the Strand; but his home was in Dorset. His widowed sister, a Mrs. Paddington, of Somerset, and a younger sister, Miss Dorothy, managed his town establishment for him. They had but lately come to London; and had left Lady Petre, the widow of the late baronet, and her younger son, at home in Dorset. Sir John was a man of good estate, scholarly habits and distinguished appearance. But he had not attained the age of thirty-four with an unscarred heart. Seven years previous to his meeting with Captain Love, he had wooed and won a lady of his county and had lost her, in a fatality of the hunting-field, just a fortnight before the date set for their wedding. This tragedy had wrought many changes in the young baronet's mind and life. From a somewhat boisterous blade he was become a quiet and reserved scholar. It had turned him from his own affairs

to the consideration of matters concerning his mother and sisters. The shock received by his own heart had inclined it to the sorrow of other hearts; and charity toward all men had taken the place of the former spirit of jovial good-fellowship. Something of the tenderness that he had lavished upon the poor lady of his choice he now bestowed upon his younger sister, Dorothy. It pleased him to fancy a resemblance between the living girl and the dead beauty; and one morning, years after his loss, on meeting his sister in the great hall at Willington, slender and bright and eager for the saddle, he had turned away in an agony of tears.

This was the man to whose heart and board Captain Love had won so swift a passage.

Supper was served in a small room off the dining-hall. The table was oval, and of ruddy mahogany. The lights of the shaded candles threw pools of liquid fire deep into the polished surface. The rare china and chaste silver were lit to star-shine at a dozen curves and angles. A fire burned on the bright hearth, against the chill of the fog. One noiseless servitor was in attendance.

Sir John sat at one end of the oval table and Mrs. Paddington at the other; and opposite Captain Love, with her dainty shoulders against the light,

sat Mistress Dorothy. To the eyes of the young gentleman who had so lately been nameless and friendless, she was a very miracle of loveliness. To describe her as she appeared to him — a poet flushed with new adventures — is beyond my art.

The conversation was light and cheery, and Captain Love maintained his share of it with wit and grace. But when Sir John put him a question concerning Turkey, he flushed guiltily.

"Let me forget it," he said, recovering himself. He fancied that a smiling glance passed between Mrs. Paddington and her brother. In certain things the reputation of that country was then even worse than it is to-day. The bare thought of it, to the young gentleman, under the existing circumstances, was as if he had played at dice on the altar of a cathedral. He inwardly lamented the indiscretion of his story. What evil genius had set his tongue to that accursed country, when all the kingdoms and empires of the earth had been as equally at his service. He raised his eyes and between the branched candlesticks encountered the grave and curious regard of the young girl. For a moment their glances held, then wavered shyly; and the young gentleman of the world was the first to bow his head. His diffidence must have been due

to instinct rather than shame; for surely, with only a few weeks of life to look back upon, he could afford to carry himself with better assurance, even under the eyes of so young and fair a woman as Dorothy Petre.

The evening passed all too swiftly for Captain Love. He sat in a glow, like one who finds the hearth of home at the end of a winter's journey — like one pinched with hunger who is of a sudden ushered in to a banquet. But they were the hands of the spirit that warmed themselves at the glow, and the cravings of the spirit that were satisfied at the banquet. For an hour he sat in a shadowy corner and listened to Dorothy's singing and Mrs. Paddington's playing on the spinet.

After the music, a card-table was drawn forth and the little company sat down to a game of whist. Fate, in the cutting of the pack, made partners of Dorothy and the captain. "Penny points," said Mrs. Paddington, as she dealt the cards.

Captain Love, with no recollection of ever having seen the game before, found himself speedily acquainted with the rules. He played his cards with less coolness than he had displayed earlier in the day when fortunes were at stake. Silence seemed to be the presiding genius of whist, and

when tongues are quiet eyes must serve as means of communication. So it happened that the girl often raised her eyes to her partner's, now in defence of some doubtfully advantageous play, again in question. He, poor fellow, soon found himself anticipating these glances rather than the turning of the tricks.

It was late when Captain Love pulled the bell beside the door of that narrow and empty house, the second floor of which he had occupied for the past eight days. Old Tom, whom he had engaged with the apartments, and who served indifferently as both valet and groom, drew the bolts and admitted him. In his left hand the old fellow held a candle at so eccentric an angle that the flame leaped and sputtered against the rim of tallow. His woollen nightcap was all awry on his gray head. He groaned and grumbled as he closed the door and shot the bolts. The captain paused at the foot of the stairs.

"What ails you, Tom," he inquired, with a foot on the lower step and a hand on the banister.

"Ay, ye may ax," mumbled Tom, "ye who lays abed 'til noon on the finest feathers, an' warms yer young blood with good wine. But if ye was a poor

old serving-man, sir, with the chill in yer bones an' yer master a-ringin' of ye up past midnight — an' you not even knowin' his name — then ye'd know what ailed ye, I'm thinkin'."

"My poor fellow," said the gentleman, "your complaint has a core of reason to it. That nothing is so painful to the small of intellect as unsatisfied curiosity, I have heard or read somewhere or other. I am sorry that you and your good dame have had to suffer so for the past week, and now I hasten to relieve you. My name is Love — Captain Richard Love. My father is a country parson in the North. Here is something for you, my good Tom — and now run away and tell your wife."

The servant held the gold coin close to the candle.

"Thank'ee, Cap'n. Mighty civil of your Honour, I'm sure."

He looked his master up and down.

"Lord, but I'd take 'e for the son of a dook, sir. Kate, she said that, when first she set eyes on ye; but I was thinkin' maybe your Honour was a highwayman."

The captain frowned.

"My man," he said, coldly, "surely you do not expect me to explain to you the reason for my

week of namelessness. There are difficulties and pits to be avoided even in the paths of gentlefolk. Let that suffice you."

Thereupon he took the candle from Tom's hand and ascended the stairs to his own rooms, leaving the impudent old servant to knock his shins in the dark. Safe in his own sitting-room, which was of fine proportions but scanty furnishings, he emptied his pocket of the money he had won at Babcock's, and mended the fire on the hearth. Then he laid aside coat and sword, lit three candles on the table, and sat down. The incidents of the day passed before him, clear-cut pictures astir with the spirit of romance.

A fever was upon him — a fine, reckless, singing fever of the heart and brain. He took up a quill and dipped it in the ink.

It has been truly said that inspiration is largely a matter of application — that the Muse is a lady who must be ridden down and captured by force of art. But sometimes, even in these sober times, she comes to a man's door of her own accord, and he has but to open and lead her in to the fire. Unexpected, even unsolicited, had she come to Captain Love. Perhaps she had been beside him all day, holding his vision clear and setting all things to

music. Now she leaned over his shoulder, a gracious shade, and the inevitable word was ever ready on the point of his pen and the pictures stood bright and true before him. He drew them in rhymes — for that seemed the easiest way. He recalled and caught the spirit of gray streets crowded with horses and sedan-chairs, and foot-passengers of various degrees. The whole cheery scene was set down to the most delightful rhythm; the beauties in the passing windows, like portraits in their frames; the dandies with sword and cane; the statesman in his periwig, and the hurrying apprentice. He showed the elegants crowding together in the coffee-house; the players up-stairs, seated at the little tables; the rattle of ivory and gold; the set, red faces and the white; the falling homesteads and the full purses. And last, in flowing cadences, he wrote of that which gives a zest to all the varying phases and adventures of life — for a full hour he wrote of love. Then, of a sudden, a chill flooded over his spirit, and the zest of rhyming went out like the flame of a candle in a wind. His heart, quick as thought, was turned from warmth and gladness to a most bitter longing. Trembling, he wondered if ghosts from his lost past were crowding around him.

CHAPTER VII

BLOWS AND FRIENDSHIP

Captain Love spent a restless and unrefreshing night, tossing until dawn midway between sleep and waking. Hints that struggled to become memories — vague things that whispered and fled his mind's grasp — haunted him through the dark hours. The successes of the day were forgotten, as were the face of Dorothy Petre and the rhymes he had written. An awful sense of unreality daunted his spirit; and frequently, from half-slumber he would bestir himself, leave the bed and gaze into the night from the open window. He even lit a candle, and set himself to reading aloud from a book of plays; but immediately a heaviness of the brain and eyelids drove him back to bed, only to leave him, next instant, wide-eyed and aching with unrest. He longed for dawn, and the wakening of the town. He tried all the old, time-honoured methods of tricking his mind to inaction; but the weight of nameless apprehension would not lift and

sleep refused to come. He recalled every incident of the brief portion of his life of which he had any knowledge, and in none of them did he find any comfort. He had accepted the hospitality of a yeoman, and had given nothing in return. He had cracked the heads of a couple of highwaymen and appropriated their ill-gotten gold to his own false existence. He had played the man of fashion very prettily, and won a considerable sum of money and an honest man's regard — ay, and he had found himself a decent name wherewith to cloak his nakedness — and yet the thought was sour in his mouth. On what dark sea was he adrift, with no memories to guide him, and a longing in his heart such as exiles must suffer? An exile! Yes, for was he not torn from twenty good years of life, — from twenty years of love and friendships, of accomplishments and innocent pleasures. With the loss of memory might it not be that some things of priceless value were gone for ever?

"Why must I suffer?" he cried, rolling his head on the pillow. "What have I done that Fate should bludgeon me thus? God, it were better that I had died, along with my brave and unremembered friend."

For a little while his heart was black with re-

bellion; but soon repentance came, and he murmured that he was a wicked and ungenerous fool — that he had done nothing, since his awakening from the mists, that any fool could not have accomplished — that he was as useless to the world as he was alone in it.

Of a sudden the pale, frightened face which he had seen in the window of the tavern flashed clear to his inner vision. It struck him like a blow.

"There was work ready to my hand," he cried, sitting straight up between the tumbled sheets. "There was a soul to help, if ever the world held such, and the way pointed fair to an honourable and humane deed."

At that moment he saw the first lights of dawn gleaming pale across the windows, signalling him to hope and lifting the shadows. He lay very quiet, turned to the windows, and watched the light spread and brighten, through the great room. It washed away his vague but terrible apprehension and, presently, sleep descended upon him, dreamless and deep.

The morning was well advanced when the captain at last awoke. The room was flooded with sunshine, and the candle which he had lit to dispel the ghosts of the night burned with a colourless

flame close to the socket of the stick. He sprang from the bed and nipped and strangled the poor flame between thumb and finger. The great town, the sunshine and the zest of life called to him. With a smile, he recalled his weakness of the dark hours, and wondered why his spirit had been so disturbed. Why had he trembled, he asked himself. Youth was his; gold was on the table; and a world full of adventures lay outside his door.

The captain dressed, with care, in a dark riding-suit, and breakfasted heartily. Then he ordered the gray to be saddled, drew on his boots of Spanish leather on the heels of which rang silver spurs, and selected a long and serviceable blade from the collection beside his bed. With his own hands he loaded his pistols — a brace of fine weapons for which he had paid heavily. In spite of the return of his self-assurance and high spirits, he could not forget the promise he had made his conscience to probe the mystery of that beautiful face at the window of the inn on the heath.

" That will keep me very pleasantly employed for the day," he reflected.

The gray, which he had named Victor, was fairly skipping with ambition and good living. As the two went down the narrow streets, so gallant and

young, great folk and small folk looked after them with brightening eyes. In the village through which he had passed on his entrance to London, cottagers stared and children waved their caps, and old men, humped on shaded benches, felt a vague stirring in their dull dreams. One had been sergeant in a troop of horse, years and years ago, and once for one glorious hour (the captain and lieutenants being dead) he had rallied the fragments of the command and led them back to the fray. He had ridden a gray horse. He had looked almost as fine as that young gentleman. So, in remembrance of that gallant hour, he put down his beer mug and knuckled his forehead to the captain. And the captain turned to him, smiled and waved a gloved hand, leaving the old soldier in a fine glow and the belief that he was still a person of consequence.

At the door of the tavern in which he had slept from early morning until past noon after his night of adventure, and where the sweet dream had found him, he drew rein and called for a stirrup-cup. The bulky landlord himself appeared in answer to the summons.

"I have the wines of Spain and France, white and red," he gabbled. "Likewise Canary and

Sherry wines, brandy and claret. Our home-brew is the best in these parts, and drunk largely by the quality. You can't name a Christian drink, sir, that don't lay in my cellar — not even red rum, from the Carib Islands, nor the juniper liquor that the Dutchmen get fat on." He paused, breathless, and looked fairly at the youth on the big gray. "Stap me," said he, "if it ain't the little highwayman."

The smile faded from the captain's face.

"What d'ye mean b-by that?" he asked, almost stammering in the effort to control his voice. At the same time, he leaned forward in the saddle and fixed his bright, dark eyes on the inn-keeper's face.

"I might have knowed it from the first," replied the fellow, "when you rode up so early in the mornin' on that there gray, an' with the bag o' gold on your saddle. Honest men sleep by night an' ride by day — an', if they be wise, they leave the bulk of their coin at home. Then you jumped as if you thought the hangmen had you, when I woke you sudden." He gazed reflectively at the horse. "I've heard queer tales about that horse, in the last few months. Many's the solid squire a-cursin' them four legs o' his."

"I am Captain Richard Love," said the other, quietly.

"Oh, ay," said the landlord. "You'd be a captain, for sure. One of your kidney — he was strung up last February — called himself a colonel."

The gray, at a hint from his master's knee, stepped closer to the innkeeper.

"You are a liar," said the captain, in a voice sweet as honey. "You are a filthy, overfed, scandalous swine. You have no sense of decency or honesty. If my groom were with me I should tell him to whip you."

The big innkeeper gaped with amazement; then his ruddy visage turned, in hue, from salmon to purple. His hands clinched and his dull eyes flashed.

"What's that?" he cried.

"Fellow," replied Love, "if it were not for the tenderness of my heart, I would ride you down where you stand or knock in your thick head with a pistol butt. It is what you deserve, you rascal. But I pity you. You were born a fool, no doubt, and have never learned manners. If you were a gentleman — yea, even a poor excuse for a gentleman — I'd meet you with swords, and let a deal of bad blood out of your great carcass. As it is, I will descend to your own level and give you a sound

drubbing with my fists. I'll teach you to mistake gentlemen of the first quality for highwaymen."

"D'ye mean you'll get down on your two feet an' let me have a whack at you?" asked the rustic, his amazement renewed and his rage somewhat abated.

"That is what I mean," replied the captain, easily. "You are larger than I am; but I have a feeling that I know something of the art of this clodhopper method of fighting that may surprise you. But, first, bring me a pint of your best claret, for my mouth is dry with talking."

"Nay, nay," said the other, shrewdly. "Ye'd set spurs to your nag, an' gallop away, the minute I turned my back. Nay, nay, my fine cock. I'll just keep my eye on you till I get my hands on you."

"I am feeling quite kindly toward you, now," said the captain, "so please do not make me angry again. It may be worse for you if you do. If I entertained any desire to ride away, I'd do it as easily with your face toward me as your great slab of a back. But you can have your own way and I'll have my drink, too; so call a servant and give him my order."

The claret was brought in a pint mug; and as

the captain raised it, he said, "*You* should take a quart of it, my man, to fill up your veins — for I'll tap 'em, by way of your nose."

The innkeeper tried to smile, but the coolness with which the gentleman made the extravagant assertion daunted him not a little. Was he in a fair way to catch a Tartar? he wondered. He watched the strange young man drain the mug of claret, and felt both uneasiness and curiosity.

"If ye're not a highwayman," he said, presently, "then what are you doin' a-ridin' 'round on a highwayman's horse?"

"You are full of questions," replied the captain, pleasantly, as he returned the mug, and tossed a piece of silver to the man who had brought the wine. "But you'll not be feeling so interested in my affairs when I am done with you," he added, without heat.

He walked the gray around to the stable-yard, dismounted, took off his sword, coat and hat, and turned up the sleeves of his linen shirt. He felt no fear, though the fellow he was about to engage with must have weighed fully four stone more than he. An inner consciousness that he had learned many tricks of using his fists, both in attack and

defence, gave him a fine sense of security. A dozen blows and parries, learned he knew not where, were clear in his mind. He would avoid the other's rush by stepping aside, and plant a light jolt on the bull neck, below the ear. He would take a swinging blow on his left forearm and, at the same time, administer a smart prod in the rustic's eye. Gad, he'd done it before, as sure as the sun was shining! He felt no more doubt of the outcome of the affair than if the engagement were with swords or pistols.

"Come on," he said, with a pleasant smile. "The sooner we begin, the sooner you'll be comfortably in bed."

The innkeeper rushed at him, with his ham-like fists a-whirling. The captain side-stepped, and smote him in the neck; but one of the flinty knuckles cut his cheek and quite spoiled his mood of pleasantry. On the other's stumbling return he met him briskly, dodged, avoided a frantic swing, and then set to work like a smith at his anvil. In a minute, mine host lay prone and bleeding in the muck-heap.

"Wash him off, and carry him to bed," the captain commanded of the men and boys who had hurried to the yard to see the fight. They obeyed

promptly; and the victorious gentleman, after wiping the blood from his cheek, hastily rearranging his toilet and ordering that the gray horse be stabled, followed into the house.

CHAPTER VIII

CONFIDENCES

In the excitement of the fight with the innkeeper the captain's mind was turned, for awhile, from his high intention of inquiring into the interior economy of that other house, out on the lonely heath. He was so interested in life that, childlike, he was diverted by every passing phase of it. Though anger had pricked him to engage with the innkeeper, he had punched him without malice; and now, when the need for punishing was past, he helped put the fellow to bed and then bandaged his brow and chin and bathed his eyes, all with the most affable tenderness, the while the stable-folk and the kitchen-maid (mine host was a widower) looked on in admiration.

"Where is he?" the battered one inquired, presently.

"Here I am," replied the captain. "How are you feeling?"

"Feelin'? Lor', sir, I'm past feelin'," said the

sufferer, through his bandages. "Sure as my name's Joseph Clark, I'm bashed to a pulp. Pistol-balls wouldn't hit no harder than them fists of yours."

"I am sorry, Joseph; but if I had not hit you hard, you would have hit me, most undoubtedly," replied the captain.

"Didn't I touch you, sir?"

"I got one scratch."

"Tom, bring up claret for the colonel. The best we have, mind you."

"Captain," corrected the gentleman.

"If you ain't a colonel, then you should be," replied Clark.

"Bring the drink, Tom, and hurry about it. Then you can draw beer for everybody that saw me get whipped, and drink to the health of the gentleman that done it. An' I want to say — you hold on, Tom, and listen — that I was a fool for what I said to the colonel, an' that I eat every last word of it, an' that I got what I damn well deserved."

"That's handsome said," remarked the man Tom, and hastened for the liquor.

"You have an honest and generous heart," said the captain, "and the unfortunate things you said

to me are forgotten, as, I hope, are my hasty and ill-mannered retorts."

The innkeeper chuckled painfully.

"You laid your tongue to me, an' that's a fact," he said; "but I hope you'll forget both ends of that business, sir. When the wine comes — I hear Tom's step now — drink hearty an' call for more. An' if you don't think it will harm me, nor heat my blood too much, after the brandy you've poured into me, then I'll just make so bold as to take a gill o' the stuff myself an' drink your Honour's good health an' my wishes for your happiness."

"'Twill do you good, my friend," answered Love. "And I'm highly flattered, I'm sure, and return your generous compliments with pleasure. Here, let me ease your head a bit from the pillow, and steady the glass. Sound wine never hurt an honest man yet, my dear Joseph."

The two spent the remainder of the morning (the one in bed and the other in an armchair close by) in an exchange of compliments and toasts. The spirit of good-fellowship danced in the air and its outward and visible form gathered, in dusty shapes with long necks, on the table beside the bed. The landlord's oldest friend would not have known

this be-bandaged, talkative and kindly fellow for the same Joseph Clark. The two dined together at noon; and though the host found some difficulty in negotiating mouthfuls of the size to which he was accustomed, he managed a very respectable meal.

"I tell you, captain," he said, after dinner, "I haven't felt so warm an' clear about the heart in two years — no, not for ten years, maybe. 'Twas ten years ago, come Michaelmas, I lost my woman; an' it was two years ago, Christmas night, my daughter run away from me. She was as fine a lass as any in the land, sir, an' her dear mother over again for looks an' manners. By God, captain, that was a hard blow to me when she run away with some young buck I didn't so much as know the true name nor condition of. I was a good father to her; an' I defy any man to say nay to that — but she left me, sir, without so much as a kiss, for remembrance, as if I was no more to her than Tom Sprat. It was snowin' when I missed her, an' close on to midnight. I rode over the country till dawn, an' froze a foot an' damn near killed my black geldin', but didn't so much as sight her. That was a stiff blow, captain! You'll know how it would feel when you've a child of your own, sir. Friendship, nor sport, nor liquor, haven't warmed

my heart since, an' I'm gettin' the name of a surly fellow. But to-day my heart feels sort o' warm, and free the ache, an' the liquor has a taste an' glow to it, like it had of old. You must have let some old, stale blood out of my head that was pressin' on my mind, sir."

The captain was sympathetic, and questioned him kindly about the loss of his daughter. Clark knew little that he could swear to, and had neither seen her nor heard from her since the night of her vanishing. All he knew, for certain, was that she had gone away in a closed carriage, with a stranger who had visited the inn many times before that and never afterward.

"She may be dead, for what I know," said Joseph Clark.

"Nay, doubt not but she is alive and happy," replied the captain. "A lass of discretion and honesty, you may be sure, would leave her father only for a deeper love — and such a lass would love none but an honest man. Women are wiser than men, my friend — at least, so I have read, somewhere or other. For my own part, I do not believe I know a great deal about them." He leaned his elbows on his knees and his chin between his hands, pondering. "What I remember about women

would not amount to — that," he said, after a brief silence, leaning back in his chair again and snapping his fingers. "The farmer's lass; Dorothy Petre; the girl at the window — ay, there's the full story. But I'll swear that I know more than I remember. I think it must be that my heart retains many things that my brain cannot recall."

"Captain, you are a wonder," remarked the innkeeper. "A man of less wit than me, a-listenin' to some of your sayin's, might call you a fool — not out loud, mind you, but to himself. I watched you close, sir, till you shut my eyes for me, and ever since I've listened to you close, an' you sound to me, sir, like a gentleman in two minds. You may not understand just what I mean, captain, for I'm damned if I do myself; but that's how you seem to me. You've had a blow, maybe, of one kind or another — it might be in fortune or it might be in heart — an' when you are gossipin' o' something else, an' feelin' warm with wine, all of a sudden the old pain stabs you an' throws your mind on to the old trouble."

"Do I act like a fool?" asked the captain, musingly and with a note of bitterness in his voice. "Ah, Joseph, I am more than half-convinced that, in so doing, I but act the part to which Fate has

ordained me. Do I seem a man in two minds? — or in none at all? Oh, my honest friend, you have guessed shrewdly in guessing that I received a blow — that pain stabs me — that my mind turns, ever and anon, to the bitterness of an old trouble! You have lost whom you knew and loved — a fond wife — a lovely daughter — and the warmth of sunlight, the glow of wine, the comfort of friendship have slipped from you. I have lost years, and loves and memories — God, I know not what I have lost! My mind goes back to June — but my heart goes aching back to the days of my childhood. You would say that I have lived twenty years — or, perhaps twenty-two? Yes; but I remember no farther back than June. It may be that I was loved by a beautiful woman; but a robber hits me over the head, and the littlest memory of that affection is lost to me. Had I comrades? Now I am comradeless! Had I fond parents? Now I am an orphan! Had I a place that knew me, and standing therein? Now I am a man without a country. And yet — and yet — this love, these comrades, these parents, may be even as they were. Death has not touched them all, I think, nor change, nor any disaster. It is I who have lost them, in losing myself. Do they call me false, I wonder — a light lover, an ungrate-

ful child, a careless friend? Then God enlighten them, for the thing is beyond my power."

"Drink," whispered Clark, in a voice of awe. "Drink, captain. Warm your heart with the liquor."

But the captain paid no heed to the invitation. He had already imbibed extensively, though his face remained unflushed and his hands steady. Leaning forward again and staring across the bed with his bright eyes, he told all that he knew of his strange story. He told it slowly, in a voice often broken with emotion; and when he had finished, he bowed his head in his hands.

"By God," whispered the innkeeper.

CHAPTER IX

THE HIGH ADVENTURE

THE captain did not leave his new friend until the next morning. Even then, the innkeeper begged him not to go, and, above all things, not to risk his life in a second visit to the house on the heath. He worked himself into a fever at the idea.

"What call have you to go back to that place?" he cried. "They are devils there. The house is the very porch of hell. Every murderer and robber in the country knows that place, else I'm a fool. A face, you say? A woman's face at a window. Fie on you, sir, for such tomfoolery. She is part of that devil's trap, I'll swear. Damn me, but I never heard such madness! Surely there are faces enough an' to spare — lasses' faces, pretty faces — without a gentleman runnin' his head into that jaw of death for a little amusement. The woman's a baggage, sir, mark my word."

"Joseph, there is reason in your view, for you

have not seen her," returned the captain. "But I have seen her, man, and I swear she was suffering the pangs of hell. I care nothing for her beauty, mind you, but I have sworn to my own soul that I will learn how she comes to abide in that house of blood and devilish devices."

"I tell you, lad, she'll not thank you for your trouble, unless she manages to lure you to your death," said Clark, mournfully. "Heed not her tears, lad. Shut your ears to her words. Do not enter the house. If she wishes to leave it, she will spring to you from the window."

"Don't worry, Joe," replied the captain. "I'll be back before sundown, sound in body, an' easier in spirit, and the danger drawn from that house of blood. I'll strike the fear of death into that old hag."

And so he rode away, all his courage returned to him and his heart strong with the high ambition of righting wrongs and overthrowing the wicked. He felt actually gay, what with the freshness of the morning, the glow of the new friendship and the noble cause in which he was riding. He entertained no fear of sword, or pistol, or hidden trap; and the vague terrors which haunted him in the

dark hours were forgotten. He remembered the pitiful, fair face at the window, and his spirit was hot for the rescue.

Captain Love pressed forward at a good pace, arriving at the lonely tavern while the morning was still young. The group of dilapidated buildings stood in a wilderness, out of sight of any cottage or farmhouse, though at a distance of scarce half a mile from the great highway. Thousands of acres of unprofitable heath and rough pasture spread to every point of the compass. For ten miles or more, north and south, ran a district so perilous to travellers that it was known as Ready-Trigger Heath. Many a solid gentleman had issued from the passage of it with shaken nerves and a slit purse. Throats had been slit there, as readily as purses (though with less profit), and brains had been blown out and skulls cracked, all up and down that notorious countryside.

In the fair light of day, the lonely tavern and its outbuildings impressed one even more desolately than at night. The walls were gray-black with the stain of foul weather. The roof of the house was of dark slates, the chimney of black stone. The thatchings of the stables were black

with rot and age. The yard was devoid of that homely bustle of poultry which is so cheering in country places. The brisk air and lively sunshine spent themselves upon that dreary habitation in vain, unable to lift so much as a shade of the vague and haunting gloom which enveloped it.

Captain Love skirted the place riding with unwonted caution. Near the stable, in which horses stamped and nosed their forage, stood a large and sleepy-looking man in the orthodox smock and gaiters of a farm-labourer. His head was bound 'round, from jaw to crown, with dirty linen. His hands, though large and muscular, showed no wear or disfigurement of toil, and his red-brown eyes were at once bold and sly, daring and unsteady. All this, the gentleman noted at a glance.

"A fine morning, my good fellow," he said, drawing rein and looking swiftly about him, and then back at the man's face.

"Fine enough," replied the man, with his eyes fixed upon the gray. Then he knuckled his forehead, awkwardly, like one playing a part much against his taste.

"Ay, sir, a rare day it is," he added — "for them as is able to enjoy it." He shifted his gaze

from the horse to the rider, instantly lowering it again.

"What is your business?" he asked.

"I'll tell that to your master," replied Captain Love.

"I am master here," said the fellow. "Honest folks has hard farin' these days, so I keeps no man. The old folks live with me, an' are at the house. If you would have a glass, or a snack to eat, I'll take your nag."

"Very good," said the captain. He dismounted, and tossing the bridle to the ostler, followed through the narrow doorway of the stable. Once within, he clapped a pistol to the back of the fellow's neck. "If you let so much as a whisper out of you, I'll blow your head off," he said. For about ten minutes he employed himself in binding the man with rope and gagging him with sacking.

"I suspect you of grave crimes," he remarked. "I could even make a guess as to how you came by your broken head. Lie quiet, or I may put you beyond the hope of bandages."

He led Victor outside again, mounted and rode toward the tavern. A twist of smoke arose from the chimney, but neither the windows nor doors

showed any sign of life. He pressed close to the front door and rapped on it with gloved knuckles. He heard a movement within, the rattle of a chain and rasping of bolts, and, next moment, looked into the upturned face of the old hag, framed in the narrow space between door and casing. Impotent rage flamed in her eyes, for they gazed into the muzzle of one of the captain's pistols.

"Throw open the door," said he, "or you die with your sins on your soul."

She hesitated.

"You need not look for help from the fellow in the stables," said Love, "for he cannot so much as help himself."

With an oath, she drew the door open and stepped back a few paces. The captain bent low in his saddle and peered within. He saw the fragments of a meal on the table, the old man nodding by the hearth, and a man in shirt and breeches snatching a blunderbuss from the wall. The old woman turned, following his gaze.

"Haste," she cried. "Make haste, you fool! Spatter him out of his saddle!"

The man swung around and raised the slow weapon to his shoulder; but the captain's pistols bellowed in the doorway, and man and weapon

"MAN AND WEAPON THUMPED UPON THE FLOOR."

thumped upon the floor. At that the old woman fell also, rolling and screaming hideously.

The captain reined back from the doorway, and looked sharply about him, expecting some dangerous response to the hag's outcry. But neither man nor beast appeared from the shelter of the outhouses or the thickets on the heath. Dismounting, he ran into the tavern, a pistol in his left hand, his sword in the right. On the instant of his entrance the old woman rose on her elbow, a clapping report stunned his ears and his hat went spinning from his head. He reeled against the jamb of the door, for a second, somewhat shaken in nerve. The smoke of the pistol hung in the still air of the room, and beyond it he heard the triumphant and fiendish laughter of the hag. And then, quiet as a bird, something sped past him, and ran into the sunlight; and the laughter of the old hag changed to screams of fury.

Captain Love ran from the house and gave chase to the young woman; and as he ran he wondered if, after all, she were a willing part of this evil company. But, remembering the look on her face when she gazed from the window on that earlier morning, he put the thought away from him as unjust and dishonourable. She ran swiftly, in her thin

gown, while he was retarded by his jack-boots and great spurs and skirted riding-coat. But he came up to her at the edge of the thicket in which he had once hidden four horses.

"Fear nothing. I am your friend," he gasped. He flung forward his left arm (his sword was in his right hand), encircled her pliant waist and, halting suddenly, drew her back against his shoulder. With her face averted, she struggled to get free, twisting her slender body and striking with her little hands.

"My dear young lady," he expostulated, mildly, holding tight and doing his best to avoid her blows. "Calm yourself, madam. I am not one of these, I assure you. Easy, madam, easy, or you will do yourself a hurt. I have come to save you, remembering your face at the window. Madam, madam, do not struggle so, for God's sake! I am a gentleman, my dear young lady."

At that she ceased her battling and turned her face to him — a face drawn and thinned by terror, eyes afire with many terrific emotions. A flash of hope sprang from brow to chin, as her eyes met his, and the pitiful brow and trembling lips were beautiful.

"You are he — who escaped?" she whispered, scarcely above a breath.

"And I have come back to take you from this place," he answered, gently.

At that moment he felt a touch on his right shoulder, and found his horse nosing him. And now the woman sagged on his arm, and her face was white as paper.

"Will you come?" he asked, bending close.

For a second her eyelids fluttered up; then drooped again. Her head sank against his shoulder. Her trembling lips breathed "Yes."

People stared to see the big gray clattering along, carrying a hatless gentleman, and an inert lady in a white gown. A shepherd-boy bellowed after the flying spectacle, shaking his staff in impotent rage.

"One o' they young bloods up to his devilments," he cried, and cursed furiously, affirming that, even in God's daylight, decent people were not safe from the wickedness of the gentry.

The woman lay in the bondage of the captain's right arm, her head, with its wealth of bright and disordered hair, at peace on his shoulder, and her eyes closed as if in sleep. She breathed quietly, and already it seemed that the blood was brighten-

ing beneath the pallor of cheeks and brow. Her lips, which were red as fire, had ceased their pitiful trembling. The captain looked down at her, ever and anon, with a fine lifting and quickening of the heart. To bring such peace to a woman — to carry her thus from momentary terror — was surely a great thing, he reflected. God, what lips and brow and chin! And what a crown of hair, hauntingly fragrant; and so lithe and soft a body at rest in his embrace. For a second, a vague fear and distrust assailed him, and his arm slackened ever so little. At that, her lids fluttered up and her eyes gazed into his with confidence and gratitude and a wistful wonder.

"Lie still," he said. "Lie quiet, madam, and fear nothing."

His arm tightened again, and she closed her eyes. He slowed Victor to a walk, and with imperious regard beat down the rude and curious glances of the folk whom he passed on the road.

He bent low to her upturned face.

"You do not question me," he whispered. "You do not ask to what place I am taking you."

"You will take me to a safe place," she said. "You are brave and kind. I have been in hell,"

she added, in a voice so low that he scarce heard the words.

"What is it on your breast?" he asked. "I see a glint of metal."

She shifted her position a little, and drew a short knife, encased in leather, from the top of her bodice.

"I have lost years and years of sleep," she said, "that the hilt of it might not slip from my hand. I can draw it very swiftly. I have cheated the devil with that little knife."

"Madam, madam," cried the captain, softly, in a voice of keenest distress. She thrust the knife into one of the pistol holsters.

"You will kill him?" she asked.

"I have already killed one of your tormentors, I think. I will kill them all," he replied.

"Nay, those were but his hired rascals to keep guard upon me," she said.

"Name him, and I will kill him," he said.

"I do not know his name," she whispered. "He is big and foul. He is a coward. I will tell you of him, later. Let me forget him, now, as if he were already dead."

"He is," said the gentleman, with the ring of inexorable fate in his voice. "It but remains for

me to see him, and watch the foul spirit leap, in agony, from the foul body."

"You hate him?" she questioned.

"As if he had tortured a woman of my own blood," he replied.

For some time she looked up at him, in silence, with a great and beautiful wonder in her eyes.

"Let me sit up. I feel stronger, now," she said.

Without a word, he helped her change her position. His left arm felt like lead.

"You have named me — with — with women of your own blood," she whispered, her face turned aside. "How do you know? How is it that you understand?"

"Hush, madam," said the captain.

"I have read in books of old legends, of knights and gentlemen such as you," she said.

"Nay, madam, I beg of you," he cried, modestly confused.

"You have risked your life for me, knowing me for nothing but the inmate of that fearful house — not even knowing — oh," she cried, "it is as if God had heard my prayers and sent one of his strong, bright angels to my rescue."

"My dear lady," exclaimed the captain. "An angel of God! Ah, madam, it is but in your own

generous heart that I have any claims to virtue. No man, having once seen the pity of your face in that window, but would have returned to help you. As for risk, it was nothing — and no one to care. I am no saint, madam."

The young woman scrutinized his face with a bright and insistent regard.

"Was it altogether for my sake — for the sake of the nameless woman — that you returned to that place of peril?" she asked. "Or was it for vengeance?"

"It was at the better prompting that I returned. It was for your sake," he replied.

"For my sake?"

"For the sake of the nameless woman in distress."

The captain felt a fine glow in his blood and yet something of uneasiness. Beyond a doubt, he was deeply stirred by the pleading beauty and remarkable misfortune of this young woman who sat so close before him, in the hold of his arm. He knew what a bright spirit had been hers, seeing the core of it still unquenched. Her pliant body touched him, her shoulder was against his breast, and the clean fragrance of her hair was like a breath across his face. The good gray trotted strongly; the

roads and meadows were bright with sunshine; the magic of romance was over his heart, his adventure and the whole wide world. And he was young, was the captain! But he remembered Dorothy Petre, and he remembered his haunting dream; so he answered, in a steady voice — "For the sake of the nameless woman in distress."

For fully two minutes they travelled in silence, and the lady's face was turned from him.

"Where are you going?" she asked, suddenly.

"I am taking you to a safe place," he replied. "I know of a quiet and decent inn, not more than a mile from here, where you may dwell in peace until — until the mending of your affairs."

"No, no," she cried, turning and clasping his arm. "Not to the White Heron! Not there, I beg of you! You are kind and brave. You would not treat me so."

"Madam," replied the captain, "I swear I do not understand you. It is a good house, is the White Heron, and the landlord is a particular friend of mine."

"Not there!" repeated the lady. "Oh, that is more than I could stand!"

The captain drew rein. "Why do you object to that decent inn?" he asked.

She lifted her hands to her face.

"Nay, let it be as if I had not asked you," he whispered. "I do not wish to put you to any new distress, God knows."

CHAPTER X

MORE ABOUT THE RESCUED LADY

THE gray horse Victor, still carrying his double burden, was turned into a narrow road which skirted the village. He did not relish the thought of thus avoiding the mid-day corn at the inn; but for all that he did not sulk, being a good horse.

"Your wish, my dear lady, is my command," said the captain. "God knows you have suffered enough for a lifetime! I will find you a safe lodging in town."

"Why are you so kind to me?" she asked. "And I do not even know your name."

"My name?" said he. "Why, madam, it is of small account. I am Richard Love, a poor soldier."

"Love?" she asked. "And poor?"

Her glance, moving slowly and with something of gay tenderness, flashed from his face to his fine clothes.

"I take you for a duke," she added.

"Nay, I am a plain soldier," he said.

"You ride a highwayman's horse," she ventured.

"That, madam, is a story which I shall tell when you have told me yours," he replied.

"As yet, you have asked me no questions," she said.

"All in good time," said he.

Quick as thought, a desolate mood had overcast the young man's spirit, like the shadow of clouds over a bright lake. Life, the road he travelled, the fields and gardens, even the woman before him and the gray horse between his knees, had become more unreal than dream. He could picture this and that — the inn and Joseph Clark, his apartments in town, the coffee-house, Petre and his sisters — and yet with no more conviction of their reality than if they were pictures which he had seen in a book. He knew they were so — and yet, had they slid from his mind and his view, would he have felt any amazement?

"What does it matter?" he reflected. "I am the plaything of Fate, as a leaf twirled before the autumn wind. I ride as in a dream."

He withdrew the glove from his right hand.

"Expectans equito," he read, inwardly. "For what do I wait? God, on what quest do I ride?"

The lady felt his change of mood.

"You, too," she whispered. "Have you, also, been hurt?"

"I am an exile," he replied. "But, madam, I beg your pardon most humbly for remembering it."

"An exile," she said. "Outcast from some great and lovely home?"

"From my past, madam," said he, with unusual bitterness.

"Oh, sir, forget it," she cried. "You are a man, with daring and wit. With adventure, — in warfare and gaming, — a man may drug his memory. Make a new life. Forget the past that has hurt you."

"Nay, I only wish I could remember it," said he.

Now a disturbing doubt assailed the lady's newly acquired peace of mind. Could it be that her knight was a madman? Could it be that Life had played her another cruel trick, and that this fine youth, whom she had thought a champion sent by God, was no more than a half-wit for the moment enacting a noble part by the chance of a whim? She turned and gazed at him with wide and frightened eyes. He met the look steadily and, reading the question, smiled with pensive tenderness.

"Do not fear me, madam," he said. "Even

though I talk somewhat vaguely at times, I believe myself to be perfectly sane. At least I shall act with circumspection and sanity in my care of you. Trust me."

"I do trust you," she said. "It was but for a moment that my trust wavered."

They rode into the great town, through narrow, dirty streets and the hubbub of trade. It was a mean part of the city which they had entered, and they were hustled by all manner of low people, some with wares to sell and others with jibes to offer at the expense of the captain and his charge. But the captain was wise enough to pay them no further attention than a few tossed coins and good-natured oaths. Presently they came safely to a small tavern standing midway an alley which seemed a back-water thrown off the main stream of tumult. The tavern-keeper himself ran to the gray's head. He was a small, red complexioned fellow, with quick blue eyes and a purple birth-mark on his temple.

"Welcome, milord," he cried. "Sam, come see to this noble charger, while I attend to his lord-ship an' her ladyship. This way, your worships, this way. As neat a house, this, as in the whole of

London, an' fit for a king. Youth is youth, milord, with high as well as low; and here's as quiet a little inn as one could find."

The captain, evidently paying no attention whatever to the landlord, dismounted and helped the lady to the ground.

"This place will serve us for the moment," he whispered in her ear. "We must eat, and we must consider our next step."

"This way, your excellencies, if you please," rattled the innkeeper. "Here's a room as private as any young sweethearts, high or low, could wish, and a roast on the spit fit to serve in five minutes — ay, an' wine that your lordship's own cellars couldn't equal."

Captain Love, still holding his companion's hand, turned upon the little man a severe but calm regard.

"My friend," said he, "do you take me for a baron, a viscount, or an earl?"

"An earl, my lord, an earl," cried the other.

"You are a man of keen discernment," said the captain. "But the fact is, I shall not be an earl until a certain cousin of mine is gathered to his fathers. This lady is my sister. My cousin, the present earl, expects to marry her next Saturday. We have run away together, my sister and I, for a

reason which I shall be delighted to explain to you at dinner, if you will be good enough to join us at that meal. And now show the lady to your best chamber and call a fellow to me whom I may send on an errand."

As the landlord moved away, fairly muddled with delight at the stranger's invitation to dinner, with curiosity and with suspicion, Love stooped to the lady's ear.

"I shall tell the fellow many strange lies. Do not judge me by the game I play with him," he breathed.

"I know that what you do is for the best," she replied.

The landlady, who was as abundant as mine host was scanty, led her to a clean and well-lit chamber, decently furnished and with a few potted flowers in the windows. The captain looked at Victor in his stall, refreshed himself with a glass or two of claret, and then sent the landlord himself (with gold coins in his hands and his ears full of flattery) to make certain purchases at a certain shop which he had noticed, during a former walk abroad, in another part of the town. His adopted and temporary sister must be clothed in something more serviceable than the travel-stained white gown in

which he had rescued her from the house on the heath. Having dispatched the landlord, with a fairly clear idea of the kind and quality of the garments desired, he called for French brandy.

"Gad," said he, "I seem to be in a fair way of becoming a toper. But what would it matter? It would hurt nobody but myself."

He drained his glass.

"I am a man without a past; without a name; without a place. At a whim, I do mad things. My heart is as unstaple as water, as shifty as the wind. I play a game against a hidden player, with dice of which I know not even the count. Perhaps, overcome with liquor, Chance or Luck — the gods of the drunkard and the child — may befriend me."

He called the drawer to him.

"You must get better liquor than this, if you expect me to drink," he said.

"'Tis the best brandy wine out of France, your Honour," replied the man.

"Tut, tut," cried the captain. "Take it away. Do not argue with me."

Then he sat in silence, brooding over his own extraordinary case, and the case of the young woman up-stairs, until the landlord's return.

The landlord brought a great parcel to the cap-

tain, containing two gowns of silk — one small and blue, the other large and green — two pairs of slippers with silver buckles, a plumed hat and six pairs of stockings like spider-webs for fineness. Also, he placed a fair amount of change at the gentleman's elbow.

"The footgear an' stockings an' hat I got where your lordship sent me," he said; "but as for gowns, Pollock had nothing made up. So I went to a lady I know, who is my wife's cousin an' who buys such things from the maids of ladies of quality, an' here is a green gown that was worn by the Countess of Exe no longer ago than Sunday, an' a blue gown that Mistress Dorothy Petre has danced and supped in. They are new an' clean, your lordship. My wife's cousin is very particular about such things. She deals only with the lady's-maids of the very best ladies."

"Why do the ladies sell their garments?" asked the captain.

"'Tis the maids that sell," replied the other.

"An' a rare thing they make of it, your Worship, a-robbin' their mistresses' wardrobes."

"We are all robbers, high and low," said the captain. "The heir robs the dead, even as if he despoiled a tomb. The footpads and mounted ras-

cals work the game like beasts, in blood and lust. The gentleman sits at cards and steals a farm or a fine horse from his friend. The ladies rob us of peace; of our hearts; of honour, like as not. Death robs us of friends, and daylight robs us of dreams. Soldiers rob in God's name and the king's. So what matter if the maids slip a few vanities from their mistresses' closets. Send the gear up to my sister's chamber, with my compliments."

Half an hour later the lady appeared, arrayed in the blue gown, which was the smaller of the two and had once belonged to Dorothy Petre. Her beautiful and abundant hair was freshly dressed, but unpowdered; her cheeks showed a tinge of red and the low V of the bodice disclosed a neck and throat of incomparable whiteness and texture. Her beauty was startling and at the same time appealing. The captain, after bowing, gazed at her in frank wonder and delight. She, in her turn, laid a hand on his arm and smiled up at him.

"Thank you," she said. "I do not think there is another man in the world who would have known that I needed these things. And, you see, the gown suits me very well, does it not?"

"LAID A HAND ON HIS ARM AND SMILED UP AT HIM."

"Well!" cried the captain. "Madam, it sets off your beauty amazingly!"

At that moment the tavern-keeper entered.

"Dinner is served, your Worship," he said. He stared at the lady. "'Tis a poor dinner for such quality," he continued, and then — "If your Lordship will excuse me, I'll not dine with you. Sarah, my wife, says 'tis very good of your Lordship to ask me, but she says she knows my proper place, if I don't."

When the two were seated at table, in a snug dining-room on the ground floor and not far from the kitchen, with the best of the inn's table-ware, napery and cooking between them, the captain felt freed of his sombre mood. Here he was, the accepted protector of a woman who must surely be one of the beauties of the world. Dorothy Petre was beautiful, — ah, yes, —but as silver to gold in comparison to this stranger. And there was a flame in her eyes, and on her lips; and the shadow of fear had left her brow.

"This is very wonderful, madam," he said, leaning forward to pour some wine in her glass.

"Yes, it is wonderful," she replied. "My poor heart already feels something of its old strength

and joy. Evil and terror seem but shadows now, — and with every moment, in the light of your kindness and protection, the shadows are dwindling. Oh, it is beautiful, beautiful!"

"You are beautiful, madam," said the captain.

She hid her eyes with their lashes, disclosed them full at his for a heart-beat, and hid them again, with drooping lash and lowered head.

"And a man would be a fool to deny it," said the captain, who had been hit fair by that marvellous glance.

The landlady removed the dishes; and only the wine and two glasses, and a branched candlestick, remained on the table. The candles were lighted, for dusk was filling the room.

"Madam," said the captain, "I shall take it as a great favour if you will tell me something of how Fate brought you to the strange pass from which you escaped this morning. I do not ask as one who has a right to question, nor as one entertaining any thought of judging or criticizing; nor do I ask for your story in idle curiosity. But as your protector, for the time, I request your confidence. In knowing something of how your misfortunes came about — of how your enemy got you in his toils — I shall be able to plan your immediate movements,

as your temporary guardian, with the more assurance."

"You speak," she sighed — "you speak as if — as if you were already tired of your charge." Her face was averted; her voice shook. "The danger of the adventure is past — and so — and so — you have lost interest in it — and me."

The captain felt a shock at that, despite the recklessness of his spirit, but he let nothing of it show in his face. He turned and let his gaze rest kindly upon the lady. She did not meet his eyes, however.

"Perhaps you know my family?" she continued. "It is an Essex family." She shot a swift glance across the candle-light — a furtive, questioning glance.

"I do not think I know anybody in Essex," he replied.

"The name is Hollingstun," she said. "My father is a man of very considerable property, a high temper and almost incredible pride of blood and position."

"How long is it since you have seen him, madam?" inquired the captain.

"It is almost two years," she answered.

The captain had nothing to say to that, but reflected that many things might have happened in

those two years. Time has strange tricks to play with both property and pride — to say nothing of Death. He felt no little wonder at the lady taking her father's present condition and attitude so entirely for granted. Also, he felt a touch of wonder at her self-possession. She had certainly made a remarkably speedy recovery from her weakness and terror of the morning.

"My mother died when I was seven years old," continued the lady. "I was the third and youngest child. Two years ago, on the morning of my seventeenth birthday, I met a young gentleman who was visiting in the neighbourhood. He was very handsome and charming, and caught my interest immediately; and he, poor boy, fell desperately in love with me at first sight. But my father, proud and violent man, threatened to whip the boy, and to fasten me in my room, if we ever tried to meet each other again. It appears that the young man was of a comparatively modern family and of modest fortune. I was intended to marry some one of family pride and acreage equal to my father's. But that was not to be. My lover was not as modest as his fortune; and so, in that darkest hour before dawn, I descended from my chamber window by help of the ivy on the wall,

stole through the dew-wet gardens and shrubberies, entered a carriage at the turn of the avenue and drove away with the man of my choice. We had ten miles to go before reaching a certain inn where a parson and a change of horses awaited us. But not more than half of that first stage of our journey was accomplished when our carriage came to a sudden stand-still, cries and pistol-shots rang about us, doors were wrenched open and sashes broken — and I fainted away."

"Gad, it is like a story in a book," exclaimed the captain.

The lady, evidently too busy with remembering her adventures, gave no heed to his remark. She sat with one hand shading her eyes in an attitude of deep thought. "When I regained the use of my wits," she continued, "I found myself lying on a couch in a small, unfamiliar room, bound hand and foot. I screamed; whereupon the door opened and a masked man entered, unfastened my hands and gave me wine and food. I asked him a hundred questions — I begged him to return me to my home — I clasped his hands and prayed him to take me to the young man from whom I had been torn — but he answered not so much as a word to all my pleadings. I shed tears; I screamed and sobbed; I

prayed to him in God's name. But the beast only stared at me through the holes in his black mask. Soon I was blindfolded, lifted in strong arms and carried and deposited on the seat of a carriage. But why describe the horrors of that journey. At last it ended, and I found myself in that fearful house on the heath — in that hell from which you rescued me only a few hours ago."

For what seemed to them both a long time, they sat very quiet and silent. The captain felt an uncomfortable conviction that he had been listening to a tremendous lie. Just what this conviction was founded upon, he could not say. At last he pushed his chair back from the table.

"Thank you, madam. It was a most remarkable experience," he said, quietly.

The lady sprang from her seat. Her thin face was flaming and her fine eyes were like stars.

"You do not believe me!" she cried. "Oh, you do not believe a word that I have said! You think me false to your kindness."

"Nay, by God!" exclaimed the captain, desperately confused. "Nay, my dear lady, I assure you — I assure you that I think nothing of the kind."

"Oh, you are cruel," she sighed.

"That — that is unfair," he said, looking everywhere but at her pleading lips and eyes.

She sank back in her seat and hid her face in her hands. He noticed jewels on her slender fingers — jewels that flashed red and white fire at the movements of her sobbing. His heart smote him with emotions of tenderness and reproach. But he held his ground, gazing down at the weeping woman with a face of dismay and pain.

"Why did you ask me?" she whispered, without changing her position. "And why did you expect me — to tell you — the truth; — when you knew — you must have known — that the truth was so bitter?"

"Madam," said he, "I beg you to forgive me. From my heart, I beg your pardon most humbly. Consider it, if you can, as though I had asked no questions and you had made no answers." He paused, and stepped closer to her. "I must go now," he said. "You will be safe and well cared for here, and I shall see you again to-morrow. Good night, madam."

She did not move or reply, and he saw the glint of tears, like more jewels, on her fingers.

"Please do not think unkindly of me," he said. "It was in stupidity — in ignorance — that I ques-

tioned you." He touched her bright hair very lightly with his fingers. "Good night, madam," he whispered.

Like a flash she was standing before him. Quick as a breath her arms were about his neck, and for a brief mad second her lips burned on his. And then, swift as light, she was gone from the room.

The captain continued to stand there, for a little while, like one stricken by a bolt of lightning.

"By Gad!" he whispered, presently. "By Heaven! Well, I'll be damned!"

By her own confession, the woman had lied to him; also, by her own confession, she was — *what she was.* But his blood raced in his veins, his head was in a whirl, and unmeaning oaths continued to issue from his trembling lips. At last he rang for the innkeeper.

"Take good care of my sister," he said, laying money on the table. "See to it that she lacks nothing, and — and keep this matter quiet. I shall return to-morrow."

Then he left the snug, candle-lit dining-room, stumbled along a dark passage, and issued blindly upon the alley.

CHAPTER XI

THE MEETING

Captain Love, forgetting all about his good gray horse, tramped home on his own two feet. Though he walked straight enough, his head was in a maze. Was ever a man in a stranger predicament? Did ever a man live a shiftier manner of existence? he wondered. His nameless state and the risky nature of his livelihood were bad enough, surely; but the state of his heart troubled him more than these. He wondered if the blow which the robber had dealt his head had not weakened or inflamed his heart in some way; for here he was (he could not deny it) at one and the same time shaken and fired by Dorothy Petre and by the woman whom he had rescued from the house on the heath, and enraptured also by a vague dream. And this dream disturbed him most of all, for it seemed positively insane for an active man, with living beauties before his eyes, to be in love with a dream. The dream was so vague — a garden, a woman,

and a forgotten face. And yet his heart had felt no other ecstasy to compare with the ecstasy of that dream.

"Love!" he exclaimed. "Gad, but my heart is a pulp! The Fates must have tossed me that name with their tongues in their cheeks."

He reached the door of his house without adventure, and found his old servant awaiting him on the threshold, lantern in hand.

"So you're home at last," exclaimed the old man. "We've been in a fine way, a-worryin' about you. An' you've lost your horse."

"My horse? Well, upon my soul, I'd forgotten all about him," replied the captain. "But he is safe enough in a very comfortable stable."

"My old woman's mournin' you for dead," said the servant, in a milder voice. "She couldn't have carried on worse if it had been me she thought was killed. She's been in her bed all day, she feels that bad."

"I am perfectly well," the captain assured him.

"An' there be a fellow here, a-waitin' to see you since afore sunset," said old Tom. "He says his name is Clark, an' that he owns a fine inn, an' is a particular friend of your Honour's. I couldn't get him out of the house, so I locked away all the valu-

ables and have kept my two eyes on him ever since he come."

"Well, now you can go to bed," said the captain, and brushed past him and ran lightly up the stairs.

He found Joseph Clark in his room, seated by the table where burned one candle in a pewter holder. Old Tom had evidently hidden away the silver candlesticks. The innkeeper sprang to his feet and advanced with extended hand.

"I've been in a bad way," said he. "I thought them devils had made an end of you. I went out to the place, colonel, but it was quiet as death, an' the windows an' doors all fastened. So I came straight to town to look for you."

"That was very good of you. I am sorry I caused you any uneasiness," said the captain.

"I have had a most remarkable day of it," he added.

"I'll swear you had, sir. Your face shows it," rejoined Clark.

The captain set a decanter of spirits, and glasses, on the table, and also a jar of the Virginian leaf and two tobacco pipes.

"Your face shows it, sir," continued the innkeeper, as he stuffed his pipe with his thumb. He lit it at the candle. "The light's not overgood, but

it's enough to show the glow and weariness of your features, sir. Did you break up that nest of butchers, may I ask?"

"I gave them a shock. I did for one of them," answered the captain. "I shook that damned house to its foundations, you may swear to that, Joseph."

"Ay, you'd do that, sir. And what about the beautiful lady?"

The captain looked his friend squarely in the one eye which shone from the folds of the bandages.

"Why, as for the beautiful lady, I got her safely away," he said, calmly.

"May I roast in hell!" exclaimed Clark.

"And you may well call her beautiful," said the captain.

"Stap my vitals!" cried the other.

"And she came away willingly. She rode in front of me, on the gray horse," continued Love.

"But I'll vow she took a good look at you, first," said Clark. "A girl might ride away with you, colonel, an' still not be a saint. They changes their lovers, they do, whenever they see a chance to better themselves — an' small blame to 'em for changin', say I."

"Nay, you do not understand," said Love. "She was distracted with fear and disgust of that place.

She would have ridden away with her grandfather. She was in great distress. You do wrong, Joseph, to so readily think wrong of an unfortunate woman."

"Ay, maybe you're right," said Clark, with a doubtful smile. For a few seconds he pulled hard at his pipe, his eyes resting on the captain's face with a light of tenderness and amusement.

"Oh, you are young, colonel, for all your skill an' heart in fighting," he said. "You are tender inside, for all your spunk. I take it, sir, that the two things that work on you most surely — and swiftly — are beauty an' pity. After you pounded my mask, you pitied me — so then you felt devilish friendly toward me. But this woman, I swear, was both pitiful and beautiful."

"Yes," said the captain, laughing uneasily. "Yes, she is pitiful and beautiful."

Clark pondered deeply, the while he blew forth great clouds of tobacco smoke. "Where is she now?" he asked.

"She is in a safe and quiet place in town," replied Love.

"Why didn't you bring her to me, sir?"

"To tell you the truth, I suggested it; but she seemed to have a very decided objection to my tak-

ing her to your inn. I had quite forgotten the incident, queer as it was. Queer things have driven it from my mind. Now that I come to recollect it, we rode a long way 'round for no other reason than to avoid the White Heron."

"Who is this woman?" asked Clark, leaning forward and peering at the captain, with his one visible eye very bright and steady.

"I do not know," replied Love. "She told me a story which she afterward confessed was untrue. She said that she came from Essex — but that counts for nothing — and that she ran away with a young and charming lover, from a proud and inexorable father, and was torn from her lover's arms and travelling carriage by masked men, and carried to the house on the heath. But she afterward confessed that the whole story was a lie. Yes, she told me it was a lie when she saw that I did not believe it."

"What — what does this woman look like?" inquired Joseph Clark, in a voice so thin and strange as to cause the captain to stare at him in wonder. Then pity and amazement gripped his tender heart!

"I read your mind," said he; "but surely, surely it is running wild!"

"I ask you a simple question, sir. Pray tell me of her appearance," cried the other, feverishly. By now the fire in his pipe was dead and he leaned half-way across the table.

"She is frail of body," replied Love, quietly. "Her face is thin, as if with suffering, and yet very beautiful. Her lips are very red."

"Yes! Yes!" murmured the other.

"Her eyes are wonderful," continued the captain. "Her hands are slender — and soft."

"Of what colour is her hair? Of what colour are her eyes?" cried Clark.

The captain stared, blushed and stammered.

"Well, — upon my soul! Her eyes? Her hair? They are very beautiful; but damme if I know their colour! No, rip me if I do!"

At that Clark sank back between the arms of his chair, but continued to gaze fixedly at the gentleman. "You must be blind," he murmured — "or bent on fooling me."

"Fooling you?" cried the captain. "My dear man, I would not fool you for a chest of gold. You fool yourself, I think, in entertaining, for a moment, the wild thought that is in your mind. This woman is of the world. Maybe there is a strain of foreign blood in her, though to that I'd

not swear. She knows her beauty, and uses it to the full of its power. She is sophisticated. She — she is more sophisticated than — than I at first believed."

"Ay, that might well be," remarked Clark, in a bitter voice.

"My dear friend," said the captain, "you opened your heart to me, not long ago, and in return I displayed my most intimate troubles to you; so you will forgive me, I trust, if I speak frankly now. You spoke to me of your daughter; and now I am convinced that you entertain some hopes of finding her in the person of this young woman whom I have rescued from the house on the heath. God knows, Joe, that it hurts me to dash your hopes, but I must honestly say that I cannot associate my idea of your daughter with this woman. Your daughter, I take it, possessed the charms of simplicity, modesty and innocence, along with her beauty of person. This lady, though beautiful without a flaw, is not simple. I make no statement against her modesty and innocence, for she is maddeningly attractive. She is armed, at all points, for the capture of men — God forgive me for saying it! Oh, yes, she is charming; and I believe her heart to be

sound and generous; but she is full of arts and wiles."

"That might well be," said the other. "But tell me, why did she refuse to come to my house? — or even within sight of it?"

Captain Love shook his head. "Women have queer whims," he said. "'Twould take a wiser man than either you or me to find a logical reason in some of them. It may be that she wanted to come to town the quicker."

"If you have no objections, sir, I'll see the lady to-morrow," said Clark.

"Why, none at all; and perhaps you will be able to advise me as to my course in the matter," replied the captain. "The guardianship of a beautiful woman is not a position to be lightly considered, — and especially of a beautiful woman who has had such — such adventures," he added.

Bright and early on the following morning, the two repaired to the quiet hostel in the quiet alley. Clark, having dispensed with a portion of his bandage, displayed more of his visage and looked considerably more presentable than on the previous day. Though both his eyes were now exposed to view, one was purple as a plum and tight closed.

The innkeeper received his visitors with several skips and bows, ushered them into the private parlour and immediately took word of the captain's arrival to the lady.

"You need not mention the fact that I am not alone," said the captain.

Clark fell to pacing the room, and clasping and unclasping his great hands. "I feel it in my bones," he murmured. "You say she is beautiful. Ay, an' so was my lass, God knows! But my lass was modest as a babe. And this woman? — God keep us!"

Even the captain began to feel something of this fever of expectancy and nervousness.

"It is a chance," he thought. "Life is as full as a play of such things." He faced Clark, with a hand on the big shoulder. "If it is your girl," he said — "tell me, do you forgive her?"

"Forgive her? Yes, I will forgive her all her ingratitude and all her sins," replied Clark. "But I must see her on her knees to me, first. She must shed a tear or two for the years of pain she has caused me — and for the shame she has brought on me — and on her dead mother. Ay, we must not forget that, for all the pity of it!"

"Be merciful," said the captain. "She has suffered greatly."

They heard light, swift steps approaching the door. Both men turned, and the captain felt alternate waves of heat and cold go over him. As for Clark, his heart shook in his side, his breath dried on his tongue and his legs trembled. The door opened and the rescued lady entered. She wore the blue silk gown of the night before; her eyes were radiant; her face was tinged with swift-mantling blood. Her glance flew straight to the captain's face and, with no word, but a little, soft cry of welcome, she advanced to him, with hands extended. His eyes wavered under the intimate caress of hers. But he stepped forward (he, too, was oblivious to Clark's presence) and took her hands firmly and tenderly in his. At that moment a muffled and indescribable cry broke the magic that seemed to enwrap the room. Both turned; and the woman's face was suddenly stricken as white as paper.

CHAPTER XII

THE HELL-RAKE

THE fifth Earl of Buckley was, without question, the most disreputable gentleman in London. He had no reputation save for general rascality; and he had no gentility except his inherited patent of such — for an earl is a gentleman, whether he will or no. This undesirable peer owned lands in Kent, with a fine rental, but spent all his time in and about London. He had possessed the title and estates for six years; and even his intimate friends were ignorant as to the greater part of his career previous to that time. There was a rumour that he had left England at an early age, under circumstances so questionable that it was with a very sound reason, that, even now, he kept away from his own county. It was known, for certain, that he had fought the French in the wilderness of North America; but even over his brief career as a soldier there hung a cloud. Some said that he had slain a comrade with a blow dealt in the dark — others,

that he had fled openly from the enemy on more than one occasion and had, at last, been ignominiously kicked out of his regiment by his brother officers without any reference to the higher authorities. Such a thing might easily have happened at that time and in the North American wilderness. He had, after that, adventured in trade with the red savages of that wild country, and had lived their primitive life for years; but the story of his marriage to a squaw and ultimate ejection from the tribe, for dishonesty, had so frail a foundation that it is scarce worthy of consideration.

Dishonourably ejected from both the army and the fur-trade, the fine fellow took to the sea and followed it for several years, though in what capacity and what manner of craft, Heaven only knows. Rumour had it that he was a pirate, not an ounce better than Dead-Eye Silva and Dick English — worse, perhaps, in so much that he lacked courage and brains. Let it suffice that, when he returned to England to take up the title and estates, he brought from the hazy past neither medals nor fortune nor friends.

Even when established in the country of his fathers, with a title, lands and coin, Buckley did not shine in any capacity. Though possessed of a cer-

tain kind of wit — a low cunning — he was no better than a fool as a peer of the realm. As a landed proprietor he accomplished nothing but the spending of the rents. As a gentleman about town — why, there was not a stable-boy in London but could have played closer to the part. Manners he had none; but, instead, a number of gross habits and stupid grimaces. His conversation consisted almost entirely of oaths; and his oaths were as devoid of appropriateness as they were of elegance. Sober, he might be mistaken for a drunken alderman. Drunk, he was no improvement on the pirate he had been.

In anger he was vicious, and in mirth, offensive. On more than one occasion since his advent into London life had he confirmed the rumours of his past by proving himself a coward. His adventures in the wilderness and on the high seas had taught him discretion, however, and he sometimes displayed a positive genius in discriminating between men who could be safely bullied and men whom it was wiser to leave alone.

Buckley's attitude toward women of every degree was both revolting and laughable, or entirely one or the other. The vanity of the man in this connection was gigantic. He honestly considered

himself to be a breaker of hearts, though (unless the story of the red squaw was true) he had never so much as touched a woman's heart (except with disgust) with anything but gold. In fact, he was the most uncouth and disgraceful figure — be it of noble or commoner — in the whole kingdom. He had a following, however, and never lacked companions for a revel nor at the gaming-table. Also, the doors of many presumably decent houses were open to him — which, thanks to the wide lands of Buckley and the standing of the title, would have been the case had the earl been the devil himself.

Buckley occupied a sumptuous house in London, kept an army of servants, and went through life at a gallop. His most intimate companions (he had no friends), however, were never sure where to find him, for he had a trick of disappearing from his house at irregular intervals, sometimes for a day and sometimes for a week. When questioned as to where he had been and in what devilment engaged, he either laughed or cursed, according to his mood at the moment, but by no chance made any disclosure.

For all his fine pedigree, this earl detested men of breeding, for in his heart he must have known himself for what he really was. Sir John Petre was

to him what a red cloth is to a bull, though a very proper sense of fear kept him from showing his feelings too openly. He feared the baronet's sword and pistols as sincerely as he hated his grave face, modulated voice and polished manners. There were many more gentlemen in London toward whom he felt the same way — and Captain Love had not been long in town before he, too, was on the list. In Love's case, the earl did not exercise the same care in disguising his feelings as he did in some of the others, for Love's position was not exalted, nor even clearly known. He admitted that he was a soldier of fortune; the son of a country parson; only distantly related to the substantial county family of the name, so, short of bodily injury, Buckley considered that he had nothing to fear from the little captain. Believing him to be possessed of neither friends nor property, he decided that here was a safe target for the shafts of his ugly temper; and so, in their frequent meetings in public places, he treated the youth with open rudeness. For some time it seemed that the captain was not so much as aware of the other's presence.

On the afternoon of the day following Captain Love's rescue of the lady from the house on the heath — the lady who, for all her beauty, charm

and sophistication, proved to be none other than Joseph Clark's lost daughter — Lord Buckley called on Dorothy Petre, at the house of her brother the baronet. He had met the young lady some months before, at a ball at the Marquis of Tucknor's, and, deeply impressed by her charms, had kept her in his mind ever since. A man must settle down some time or other, he had at last decided, and as a part of settling down is surely the wedding of a wife, why should he not offer himself and his title to Dorothy Petre. For looks, she hadn't her equal in town; and it was well known that she possessed, in her own right, a fair property near Willington that had come to her by way of a great-aunt. There was no doubt in Buckley's mind as to the outcome of the venture. The lady would be flattered; the baronet would be flattered; the whole town would feel that the young lady had made an excellent match. For a time, the earl had played fast and loose with the idea — then a word in his ear, from one of his intimates, that the young adventurer, Captain Love, was exhibiting a prodigious friendship for Sir John, sent him about his errand.

In his most gorgeous apparel, and eminently sober, Buckley drove in state to the door of Petre's house, descended from his carriage and pulled the

bell himself. In the hall he was met by Sir John. They bowed to one another with a deal of ceremony, Buckley feeling that he could show a trick or two of breeding to any damn baronet in England.

"I have the honour," began the earl — "ah — I have taken the honour — and pleasure — upon myself of calling to pay my humble respect to your sister."

He made this speech with visible effort. Petre eyed him with a chill and inquiring half-smile.

"My sister?" he inquired.

"Ay, your sister. The little one," replied the earl.

"This is vastly polite of you," said the baronet. "I'll remember to tell her that you called."

"I want to see her," exclaimed the earl. "Gad, man, d'ye think I came to exchange the time o' day with you?"

"You cannot see her," said Sir John.

"D'ye know who you are speaking to," cried Buckley.

"Only too well," replied the other. "Good day to you."

"You'll suffer for this," exploded the earl. "I'll have your damn watery blood for this!"

For the moment his discretion was lost in rage and injured vanity.

"In the meantime, my lord, I'll trouble you to get to the devil out of my house," said Petre, in a tone which began very softly but thickened and quickened dangerously at the end.

So the earl went, quite forgetting, in his haste, to make any arrangements concerning the time or place or manner in which he was to satisfy his outraged feelings by spilling the blood of the baronet. He went to Babcock's and strove to drown the memory of the rebuff in a quart of wine; and the quart was no more than comfortably put away, and the fire of it just beginning to glow and pulse within his skull, when Captain Love entered the place.

The captain looked pale and preoccupied. He had gone through a disturbing time, what with the meeting of Clark and his daughter, just after breakfast, the lady's subsequent accusations that he, Love, had tricked her into her father's hands, — and after that, hysterics. At last, however, father and daughter had gone quietly away to the White Heron, in the captain's own carriage. The young woman had made several honest efforts to tell her story, but, though Clark had seemed satis-

fied and enlightened, the captain had not gathered any clear impression of the matter. She had run away with one man, been kidnapped by another and, for two years, had been a prisoner in the house on the heath. She said that she did not know the name of the man who had kidnapped her, or what had become of the lover from whose inadequate protection she had been so rudely torn within a few hours of the elopement. Clark, for all his bluster before her entrance, had forgiven her and taken her into his arms as soon as he had recovered from the first shock of the meeting. Indeed, he had asked very few questions, and had forced no answers. But question after question, unuttered by the voice, rang through the captain's brain. He strove to put them away from him; but, even after the departure of the father and daughter, the little devils of curiosity and supposition continued to torture his mind and heart. Even in his own house they did not leave him. She was so beautiful. She was so fine. He was a fool, a blackguard, to let his thoughts dwell on that awful imprisonment. And who was the man who had kept her in that house for two years? And what had she intended him — Love — to understand by her caresses?

When the captain entered Babcock's, seeking

diversion from his thoughts, he felt as dejected as he looked. It seemed to him that every new experience proved, more and more conclusively, that life was out-of-joint and the world upside-down.

"'Tis a blind game," he reflected — and at that moment, in glancing about the room, his eyes met the heated and insolent regard of Lord Buckley. He returned the stare for a moment with cool indifference, then chose a seat at an unoccupied table and beckoned to a waiter. He had no more than tasted his liquor than Buckley came to his table.

"Don't you know me?" asked the earl.

The captain looked him up and down. "Why, yes, I believe I do," he replied.

"Who am I?" asked the other.

"The Earl of Buckley."

"Yes," cried the bully. "I am the Earl of Buckley. And who the devil are you?"

"Don't you know me, my lord?" inquired the captain, raising his eyebrows.

"No, I don't. Who are you, an' where d'ye come from?"

"I'll tell you who I am," said the captain. "I am the man who, in all probability, will pull your lordship's nose before many seconds are past. You are drunker than usual, sir. Go back to your seat

and attend to your own affairs, for I'm not in a mood to stand any more of your insolence."

"You — you upstart! You landless dandy!" began Buckley.

"Go back to your seat," said Love, "or else I'll whip you now, and shoot you to-morrow morning."

The earl's face became purple from the pressure of futile rage within him. Now, for the second time within the hour, he found himself in a position from which there seemed to be no way of graceful escape. His bubble of insolence was pricked and the eyes of the young adventurer surveyed him steadily and expectantly, as if their owner but waited the signal for the nose-pulling to begin. Buckley knew that if the affair were allowed to progress to nose-pulling he would have no choice but to fight; and he shrewdly suspected that the outcome of the fight would be in the captain's favour. However that might be, he had not the courage to face the chances. At last, with a desperate effort, he controlled his voice and his features.

"My young sir," said he, "you have a devilish bad temper. You should keep it in better order. How d'ye expect to make a place in London, if you go about offering insult to noblemen. Every man is liable, at times, to speak a trifle hastily when in

liquor — so I advise you, captain, to exercise a better judgment, in such cases, in the future."

The captain stared for a moment, then sneered openly. "Well, I'm damned," he exclaimed. "Why, you great oaf, you haven't the spirit of a pot-boy."

But the earl had turned away, pretending not to hear.

The captain finished his liquor and then went upstairs where, playing recklessly and with but a half of his mind on the game, he won half a pocketful of gold. He was leaving the place, in company with several friends, when the notable Babcock himself bowed before him, to attract his attention.

"May I have your attention for a moment, sir?" asked the proprietor.

Love stepped aside and smiled graciously upon the stout old fellow.

"I want to warn you, sir," whispered Babcock. "Lord Buckley won't fight you, sir; but he won't forgive, neither. He has queer followers, has his lordship — so be careful, sir, how you go about after night."

The captain thanked him warmly and rejoined his friends.

CHAPTER XIII

THE BEGGAR

As the days went by, Captain Richard Love became a well-known figure to the fashionable world of London at large, as well as to all grades of society in the more immediate neighbourhood of his own house. Among the fashionables he was remarked for his air of high-breeding (which seemed proof alike against the shrewdest reverses and most startling successes at play); for his charm of person and manner; for his wit, and his romantic, though vague, history. The poor knew him for his generosity and tenderness, and he was spoken of by every beggar and unfortunate person, for blocks around, as "my captain" or "my young gentleman." Their claims of ownership existed in their love and gratitude toward him; and it was not long before these humble admirers, had they been forced to choose between the captain's smiles and the captain's shillings, would have taken the smiles, and gone hungry, with warm hearts. He had a way of

stepping into the houses of these people as a gentleman might look into a cottage on his own estate, with a paper of tobacco, perhaps, or a yellow orange — and, if need were, even a yellow coin. He preached no creed; he seemed not to be bent upon any mission save that of good-nature; but a bishop could not have been held in more honour by the sick and poor, than this charming young captain. Also, the doors of the mighty stood open to him, and his place was assured in every drawing-room of distinction in town. At Babcock's he was a leader; and half a hundred gentlemen professed the warmest admiration and friendship for him, in spite of the considerable sums of money which they lost to him at the tables. And Sir John Petre, a man of unusual reserve in such matters, was his open friend.

The captain's intimacy with the baronet, and his frequent visits to the house off the Strand, did not pass without comment. People did not doubt, for a moment, but that Dorothy was the attraction; for that young lady was not only an acknowledged beauty but something of an heiress. And the captain would be looking for an heiress; for, by his own confession, he was without property, and lived on such pay and prize-money as he had brought

with him from Turkey. Many a young blood, with lightened pockets, wagged his head at mention of the prize-money.

Since the rescue of Joseph Clark's daughter from the house on the heath the captain's hours of solitude had been more disturbing than ever. Thoughts of that young woman were hard to dismiss; even Dorothy's beauty had not touched him so sharply; and yet he could not let his mind dwell upon her without a certain daunting of the spirit. He remembered her caress with strong and mingled emotions; and the little incidents of that romantic ride with the tenderest longing. But behind every thought of her, like a black cloud, hung the horror of those two years. Though he had set out for the White Heron many times in the few months following that strange adventure, he had, save on one or two occasions, forced himself to turn back; and on those visits he had seen the lady only in her father's presence. But her wonderful eyes had spoken, even though her voice had been silent; and he had returned to town, on both occasions, filled with longing and an unreasoning sort of self-pity. It was after the second of these visits that the dream of the garden came to him again, again stirring his

spirit to depths below the little merriments and bitternesses of the common day.

For all his apparent recklessness, Captain Love shaped his course with discretion. For all his gaiety in company he spent many bitter hours in his own apartments. That he and his horse and his servants (he had enlarged his establishment) were all supported by money won at play worried him but little. The world had stripped him, and the world must refund. But that he was forced to receive the comradeship of Sir John, and the gentle friendship of the baronet's sisters, under such false conditions, cut his pride to the quick. What if he were discovered — held up to the scorn of his friends and the world — the very name he had carried so gallantly tossed back in his face for a lie? But the months went by and brought no day of reckoning.

After days of fog, Christmas morning broke bright and frosty over the myriad gables and narrow streets of London. Snow had fallen during the night; and now the tiles of the roofs were covered with the shining crystals, steeples were wreathed, and gables wore hoods and garlands of white. Urchins blew on tingling fingers and the poor shivered over scanty fires. Plumes of smoke

rose heavenward from the clustered chimneys of the rich, and rags and furs rubbed elbows in the bright streets.

Captain Love turned from his hearth and his breakfast-table and looked out of the window. He held in his hand a thin volume, fresh from the printers; and in his heart was the glow and charity of the season. In the narrow thoroughfare below he saw that which stirred both his interest and his pity. A man of large and gaunt figure, and tattered garments, leaned feebly against the wall of the building opposite. The fellow's feet were wrapped about with rags and his head was uncovered. His black hair was tied in a short, stiff queue; in his ears were rings; and in his belt a knife in a narrow sheath. After watching him for a few moments, wondering what manner of person he could be, the captain pulled a bell in the wainscoting. Presently a young footman clattered up the stairs and opened the door. The captain motioned him to the window and pointed out the strange figure below.

"A seafarin' man, your Honour," said the servant.

"And too long from the sea," said Love.

"Ay, ye may well say so, your Honour," replied the footman.

"THE FORLORN MAN OF THE SEA SHUFFLED INTO THE ROOM."

"Ask him in, Stubble, and give him food and drink," commanded the master.

Then he pushed his armchair from the table to the hearth and opened his book again. Now and then he read a line or two aloud, for it was a book of poetry. He had been thus employed for more than half an hour when the footman again entered the room.

"The mariner wishes to see your Honour," he said.

"Show him up," said the captain, still mumbling a verse. He did not close the book until he heard the stranger's rag-shod feet at the threshold. Then, with his finger between the pages for a marker, he turned his chair sideways to the fire and looked up.

"Step in," he said.

The forlorn man of the sea shuffled into the room, gave a twitch to some imaginary projection from his forehead, and stared around him at the fine rugs, the pictures and the books, with unfeigned delight. Then his gaze rested on the person of his host and, for a second, envy gleamed in his dark eyes.

"I hope you enjoyed your breakfast," said Captain Love.

"Ay, sir, I did. It was the first meat an' the

first ale I've tasted for three days," replied the sailor.

"It would be hard to go empty on Christmas Day," remarked the captain.

True he could not remember any former Christmas; but the spirit of the season seemed familiar. The other smiled grimly.

"Lord, sir, it's bitter hard to go empty any day," he said, darkly. "The ache in the belly kills a man's courage, sir, as sure as it thins his blood. But what will a gentleman like you understand of hunger and cold?" he added.

"Sit down, my good fellow," said the captain, waving his hand to a chair on the opposite side of the hearth. For a moment his guest hesitated.

"Ye'll not be making sport of my rags, sir?" he inquired. "I've been a master-shipman in my day — and, by God, there's a spice of pride still left in me."

"My dear sir," cried Love, "was there something amiss with the brew, that you have so poor an opinion of me?"

The shipman, now seated, threw out his hands with a gesture adopted from some foreign land.

"May I drown at sea," he cried, "if I ever hope to let better ale slip down my throat. Nay, sir,"

he continued, "I have the highest regard for your lordship, if I may make so bold as to say it. 'Tis little enough I've seen of gentlemen in my rough life — and them broken ones, an' small credit to the names they had the grace not to carry."

He stared down at his rag-bound feet.

"Tell me something of your life," said the captain.

The beggar moved in his chair with a quick shrug of impatience. The mask of servility fell away from his hawk-like features and he looked sternly at his questioner.

"'Tis no Christmas tale," he said, "and I'm far too comfortable to court the danger of being kicked from your door."

"I beg your pardon, most humbly," said Captain Love. "God knows what one of us — whether seaman or landsman — could disclose the history of his life with any pride in it. The strong and the wise, the bully, the knave and the fool are equally in the way of some chance disconcertion — are equally the toys of a blundering world."

The stranger smiled faintly, and allowed his eyes to wander over the books along the wall.

"Sir, I cannot agree with you," he said. "No good man and no wise one would have led such an

existence as mine. A man may fall, and rise again, repentant, with something of his honour left to him. Nay, sir, though the world may be a blunderer, a man's heart works his destiny. What I have done I have done — and the sin is mine own."

"But circumstances!" cried the captain. "Surely you cannot deny that circumstances may force innocent persons into equivocal positions."

"It is quite evident," replied the sailor, "that we have very different degrees of iniquity in our thoughts. You speak of an equivocal position," — here his voice lowered and his eyes glowed, — "and I am thinking of black, criminal sins for which gallows stand and hell burns."

The captain sighed. Then he looked keenly at the stranger. For a beggar in rags and earrings, he surely displayed a remarkable mind and an unusual fluency of expression. His guest read the look.

"I have travelled, sir, and I have used my eyes and ears; and in the long sea-watches I have read books to keep me from my own thoughts," he said.

During the remainder of his stay he spoke uncouthly, with great sea-oaths to garnish the merest trifles, and a deal of foolish laughter. But the

acting was ill done, and Captain Love felt offended by it.

"What matter if you seem a churl or an educated man to me?" he asked. "'Tis not likely we shall ever meet again. So, for Heaven's sake, be honest for a little and talk with your own tongue and your own mind. Your present conversation does not interest me."

The stranger's manner again changed. He got stiffly to his feet and gazed down at his entertainer with his former air of independence.

"You are mistaken," he said, coolly. "I am a beggar, — a forlorn mariner cast on a leeshore and broken utterly. And now I will thank you for your charity and condescension, and go my way."

The captain stepped up to him.

"Perhaps we have caught a glimpse each into the other's heart," said he, "and if I see something in yours better than you yourself know of, why consider it a liberty on my part? If I prefer you in your true manner rather than assumed, why force the latter upon me? Come, sir, it is Christmas morning, — a season in which a man must treat even himself with charity."

He drew a small purse from his pocket. "That the world has hit us both some shrewd clouts, it is

more than likely," he continued; "but, putting the blundering of the world aside, here is a Christmas present from one sinner to another."

The stranger took the purse with a trembling hand and bowed low.

"We have both failed at our play-acting," he said. "You will not believe me an ignoramus and I must respectfully doubt your pretensions to sin." He raised his head and looked steadily into the captain's eyes. "God bless you," he said, gruffly.

CHAPTER XIV

THE CAPTAIN'S OUTBREAK

THESE were days of high living in Merry England. Though people of fashion, with but few exceptions, drank their cocoa in bed, the breakfast-tables continued to display an undiminished variety of hearty dishes. Dinner was eaten early in the afternoon, and supper (a meal as elaborate as dinner) came on at about the fashionable dining-hour of to-day. And in the merry Christmas season the eating and drinking were doubled.

Captain Love was invited to dine and sup at Sir John Petre's. So, shortly after his interview with the strange sailor, he set out for his friend's house. His clothes, his shoes, and even his wig were new, in honour of the day; and what a shrewd sum the wig had cost him! His small-sword had jewels set in the silver hilt. As he threw coins to every beggar he passed, his advance was attended by blessings and humble salutations. As it was Christmas, he continued the distribution of alms far beyond the bounds of his own district.

"God bless your bright eyes, sir," cried an old women, in gratitude for his casual charity.

At that he paused, felt again in his pocket, and held out to her a golden guinea.

"Here, goody, is something brighter," he said.

"Nay, sweet sir," she cried, shaking her old head, "ye've given freely, — three bits of good silver, — an' I'll not be paid for speakin' my mind of your lordship. Bright eyes ye have — brighter than the gold in your boxes or the jewels on your lady's hands — and a heart of gold, I know; for have I not loved you since ever ye came to London."

"And what of the jewels on my lady's hands?" he asked, smiling down at her. "Have you ever seen me with a lady, good dame?"

The old body laughed happily, for here was food for gossip and vanity to last many a long day. Seven people whom she knew were gazing at her and the fine gentleman, their eyes wide with amazement.

"The sweetest and highest in the kingdom would be yours," she said; "and though my heart knows her well, I've never seen her with these old eyes. She is young and fair, and proud — ay, she would

be proud of many things. But her heart is tender as your lordship's."

"Ah, goody, you flatter shrewdly," said the captain, with a fine bow. "And now tell me — does this paragon of loveliness love me in return?"

"With all her dear heart," said the woman. "In parting and in sorrow her love does not fail."

As the captain turned away he managed to drop the guinea into a basket of crusts and broken meats which hung from his admirer's arm.

"Now, what the devil did she mean by that last," he wondered.

On reaching Sir John's house, Captain Love found two Dorset squires, who had followed Dorothy to town, already there, eying each other with a growing hostility that took but small account of all the past years of friendship. Dorothy was the only member of the household at that moment in the drawing-room. To her the captain advanced eagerly, but with an air of shyness strangely at variance with his reputation. He bowed low above her hand.

"If you will allow me the honour," said he, and gave her the thin volume in which he had been reading with such absorption earlier in the day.

He had carried it through the streets unwrapped, pressed against his left side by his left elbow.

The lady opened the book without so much as "by your leave" to the gentlemen. The captain watched her anxiously, and the youths from Dorset stared at nothing with absurdly injured expressions on their ruddy faces. The title-page, which read simply, "Songs of London. By R. L." caused the girl to lift her clear eyes to Richard's face with a glance at once so sympathetic and so shy that his heart jumped insanely under his faultless coat. For the young beauty was usually most careful in shading the lights in those bright windows of her soul.

Presently Sir John and Mrs. Paddington entered the room. Dorothy, who by that time had read the first poem twice over, darted from her seat and, pausing at the captain's side, held out the volume to her brother.

"A poet has given me his book," she said, smiling radiantly. Courage and recklessness flamed in the captain's breast. Could it be? Then what mattered his landless condition? What mattered his lost past, his insecure present, his uncertain future? The studied control of his emotions, so long sustained, went the way of the wind.

"And his heart is in the book," he replied, softly and with a desperate attempt at coolness.

Then Sir John, stepping forward briskly, took the book from his sister's hand and smiled at his friend. "I am not surprised, Dick, to find you a poet," said he. "I have seen many suspicious-looking sheets on your writing-table."

Richard flushed and bowed, and stole a sidelong glance at the girl; but she had already turned her face to Mr. Creighton, and her slim shoulder to both the poet and his gift. Ah, he had been too daring! And that sudden intimate unveiling of her eyes had meant nothing. He had been a fool to forget himself so — and to forget all that the ancients and moderns have written concerning the whims and heartlessness of beautiful women.

Sir John's voice brought him back to a consciousness of his surroundings. He started, and stared confusedly at his friend.

"Oh, these poetic airs!" exclaimed the baronet, smiling kindly but at the same time treating him to a searching glance. "Must they be acquired so immediately upon the printing of one's verses?"

In a flash the captain was himself again, — or, to speak more truly, he was again that graceful and

undismayed person that the world believed him to be.

"They are of the greatest importance," he replied. "My friends and the world shall thus know me for a poet without troubling themselves with the reading of my verses."

"I am sure," said Mrs. Paddington, gravely, "that your verses will prove very pleasant reading; but, my dear captain, I think I have never before heard of a poet who was not also a lover."

"My dear Mary, how on earth do you know that Dick is not one of the most desperate of lovers?" asked Sir John, with his eyes on the captain.

"I am sure we should have heard of it, he is such a well-known figure in the town," replied the young widow, innocently.

Richard glanced uneasily at the baronet. Then, to Mrs. Paddington:

"A poet, for vanity's sake, often decks out his muse so that she passes, in print, for a mistress of flesh and blood," he said. "In truth, the poor devil can seldom afford a passion more material, for one's fitness to pay court to a fine lady is measured by lands and gold rather than by affection and rhymes."

Even Mrs. Paddington noticed the bitterness in his voice. Sir John laughed and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Come, Dick, this is hopeless," he said. "The elegant Captain Love must first discharge his servants, sell his wardrobe, ay, and change both his skin and his manners, — before he can hope to pass for a gentleman of Grub Street. Even then I doubt not his muse would find a rival of flesh and blood."

The captain looked steadily and earnestly into his friend's face. Sir John returned the gaze as gravely; and each saw that shadow which the world had forgotten in the one case and did not suspect in the other. Suddenly they felt the eyes of Mr. Merton, one of the Dorset gentlemen, fixed on them inquiringly.

"After all, Dick, it is Christmas Day. Let us pledge it," said the baronet quietly.

They took Mr. Merton along with them to the dining-hall. Mr. Creighton scarcely noticed their departure. Petre filled the three glasses.

"Long life," said Mr. Merton, with all his attention on his glass.

"Faith," murmured the captain.

"Hope," said the baronet.

The Dorset squire swallowed his liquor and wondered at his companions' toasts.

"You left out charity," said he.

"Then we'll try again," said their host.

Having pledged to charity, Mr. Merton hastened back to look after Mr. Creighton with the air of a man who has done part of his duty and would shirk none of it. As soon as he was gone out of the room, Petre turned to his friend.

"My dear boy," said he, "let me tell you, as one who loves you as a brother and is old enough to give advice, that no game is lost until death takes a hand or shame puts out the lights."

The younger gentleman caught the other's hand and stood close to him, strangely agitated.

"You know nothing of my past, John," he said.

"You have told me nothing of it," replied the baronet.

"And yet — and yet you trust me?"

"As my own brother."

Then, ignoring a voice within him, the pretender told the story of Nullwood Lower Farm, and the story the farmer's daughter had told him.

The baronet was deeply moved; but moved by pity rather than surprise.

"It was cruel," said he. "Ay, bitter cruel; but you have faced it like a man, Dick."

"Nay, I have not faced it," replied the other. "I am a liar — an impostor. Lord, think of it — a fine gentleman without a name!"

"You have the name you bear, and which you have made for yourself," said the baronet, kindly. "Show me a more gallant or a better known in London." Then, more deliberately, "The name you have lost, through no fault of your own, is yours as surely as Petre is mine. You were robbed. The doors of your coach were carried away, so that the sight of the arms upon them should not set the whole country on the heels of the destroyers. Ah, Dick, perhaps you do too much honour to the simple baronet of Willington."

"Forgive me, my friend, if I put you to a test," returned the captain. "Whatever my real name, — great or small, — it is lost, and my assumed name may be torn from me at any moment. And yet, Sir John, I have the presumption to love your sister."

"My sister," cried Sir John, changing colour.

"Dorothy," replied the captain, with dry lips. His eyes were steady, even proud, in their frank

and challenging regard. The other's wavered and fell. For a full minute they stood in silence at the corner of the table in the great, bright room.

"Does she know of this — of your love?" asked the baronet at last. His voice was thin as a whisper.

"My lips have told nothing — and God knows I have tried to keep a guard on my actions," was the low reply.

"Do you think she feels any affection for you other than that of friendship?" inquired the baronet, with his eyes still on the floor.

"I believe her heart is free as the wind," replied the other. "Ay, and cold as the snow," he added, bitterly.

At last Sir John looked at his friend, and both tenderness and shame were visible in his face.

"Dick," he said, "this story of your misfortune has increased my regard for you, for it has shown me the true stuff of which your heart is made. I had thought that you fought some battles of which we knew nothing; and now, dear lad, I view with astonishment the odds you have so bravely withstood. Say we are friends, Dick, — better friends than ever."

"You are the soul of generosity," cried the captain, huskily.

"Nay, I am a monster," replied the other. "Call me a monster, Dick! Call me a false friend! Your forgiveness but makes my duty the harder — for, Dick, I must ask you not to disclose the secret of your heart to my little sister, until — until your affairs are more in order."

Richard leaned against the table. Passion, despair and pride struggled in his face.

"Then you doubt my story?" he asked.

"I believe every word you have told me," replied the other, "and, God knows, my heart aches for you. But, lad, would you have me speed you on a course that, mayhap, would bring years of sorrow and disgrace to both you and Dorothy? Consider your own fears for the stability of your position. Would you have the woman you love involved in the danger which threatens you?"

"I am a fool," cried the captain, passionately, "and you show amazing self-control in not kicking me from your door."

The baronet gripped his arm and stared into his face.

"Where is your courage?" he asked. "The

woman you love is alive and happy. A year, a month, even a short day may set your affairs above any danger. And in the meantime you have friends and distractions; ay, one friend, whose sword, money and name are ever at your service, and who believes you the truest heart in England. Dick, there is not a man in the world to whom I would give Dorothy more blithely than to you. Ah, lad, is it so bitter a thing to keep so sweet a secret in one's heart for a little while?"

CHAPTER XV

TROUBLE WITH CREIGHTON

Mrs. Paddington had never before found Captain Love so gallant and so entertaining as on that Christmas Day and evening. At first she wondered if John had plied him with overmuch wine during their prolonged visit to the dining-room; but, upon second thought, she put the suspicion out of her head. His stories, at dinner, were quite beyond anything she had ever heard. Even young Mr. Creighton, whose humour was as stiff and heavy as the clay of his own bean-fields, laughed three times. As for the good Merton, his mirth lasted through the entire meal. But Sir John and Dorothy listened in wonder — Sir John amazed at a spirit that could so cover a wounded heart, and the girl startled by an inner glow of pride — or was it love? Was there another man in all London like this captain who had given her his poems? — another so bright of eye, so quick of wit, so soft of voice? As she listened, her cheeks glowed and

her eyes matched his for brightness. But not once, during the meal, did he look at her with more than a fleeting glance. And that she could not understand, for his statement concerning his heart and his book had not escaped her.

More guests arrived before supper. Among them was a Lady Anne Oliver, a sturdy, high-coloured young woman, who was frankly partial to Captain Love. Dorothy watched them in a spirit new to her; and, for a wonder, there was something to watch. The captain was in a reckless mood and determined to keep up the play of light-heartedness at any cost to himself. So he accepted Lady Anne's advances with an unusual warmth, whispered in her ear, picked up her fan three times, and sat beside her at supper. And Dorothy, watching covertly, whenever her numerous swains would permit, wondered at the foolishness and fickleness of Man.

And, all the time, poor Richard's soul was on the rack. The conversation of the earl's daughter was animated in manner rather than matter. Her eyes were small, and attempted more than her Maker had intended them to accomplish. And here was the poet — a being of blood and fire and woe — wringing his face to smiles and his tongue to subtil-

ities, and the mistress of his madness in the same room. The strain told on him, and by the time supper was over he was in no mood to continue the engagement. So at ten o'clock he went home behind the big footman, and smoked a pipeful of tobacco by the fire. Then, swearing that he was weary of gaiety, weary of deceit, — ay, weary of life itself, — he retired to bed.

The morning sunlight was gold between the curtains of the windows when the captain awoke. For several minutes he lay very still, trying to catch and drag the essence of his dream into the common day. His heart was glad and tender. Something haunted him deliciously, and, even while slipping from him, maintained its elusive potency. At last, with a sigh of regret, he sat up and pulled aside the curtains of his bed. Still the sweet consciousness of a dreamland intimacy was his, and though he could recall not so much as the note of a voice or the flash of a face, the magic clung to him like the echoes of the laughter of a comrade who has but just left one's room. But this thing was finer and sweeter than laughter.

Old Tom was busy with lather and razor before the shadows of the previous day returned to the captain's mind. Even then he was not altogether

free of the furtive and happy influence of the unremembered dream. Yet was it a dream? he wondered. Might not some beautiful and gracious spirit have communed with him in his sleep? Again he closed his eyes and tried to drive his faculties back that fleeting way — to grasp the meaning of that elusive delight; but the thing was too fine, too subtile, for capture, and the very effort of will, designed to accomplish that end, dispelled it from his mind.

The captain was early at Babcock's that day, a trifle paler than usual but spick-and-span as ever. He went up-stairs immediately and found Mr. Creighton anxious to play at any game likely to prove diverting to the mind. The Dorset squire had not sat long before he discovered that the cards diverted his money even more than his mind. He emptied his pockets with an ungenerous oath. Love immediately laid down the cards.

"Do you wish to stop?" he asked.

"Damn it," replied Mr. Creighton, "I'm not afraid of the play. Creighton of Creighton Riding can afford to sit at cards with any — with any poet in town."

Ah, so there was where the shoe pinched. The captain did not smile at the other's crudity. He put

his winnings back on the table and rose from his chair.

"What d'ye mean by that?" cried the gentleman from Dorset.

"It was my mistake. Take your money," said Love, softly.

"By Gad!" cried the other. "D'ye know who you are speaking to? I'll not take your money, Master Rhymster."

The captain's thin young face flushed darkly. He turned to a waiter who stood at his elbow with a tray in his hands containing two glasses of wine.

"Here's something for you," said he, and poured the handful of gold on to the tray. Then he lifted one of the glasses, drained it and set it down. He was turning away from the equally astonished gentleman and servant when the former clutched the skirt of his coat from where he still sat in his chair.

"Not so fast, Captain Love," he said, his voice thick with rage. "Things are not done thus in Dorset."

The captain calmly disengaged the fingers from his coat.

"And how are they done in Dorset?" he inquired.

"If you will name me a friend," replied Creighton, "Sir Charles Dart will call upon him; and I am sure you will be fully informed on the matter."

The captain bowed and glanced about the room. He caught sight of Hyde, who sat at another table.

"I am sure Mr. Hyde will serve my purpose," he said. "It would be a pity to trouble any one of more pressing affairs with so small a matter."

He stepped over and asked Hyde to do him the favour of looking after his interests in the threatened encounter with Mr. Creighton. The authority on pedigrees was only too pleased to connect himself with so fashionable an affair; and shook the captain's hand and called for wine with marked demonstrations of friendship.

"Make your mind easy," said he. "I'll see that you get the fairest chance in the world to remove that clodhopper from your path."

Love did not like the implication contained in Mr. Hyde's speech. It awoke in him a sudden, sickening wonder at his state of mind of the previous evening. What cared he for rivals — unless it were for some rival in his dreams? Creighton or Merton? — let him have his way, and welcome.

"I assure you he is not in my way, but he needs

enlightenment on a small question of breeding," he said.

Mr. Hyde winked at his wine. He was far too wise to swallow any such story as that; for well he realized the charms of Dorothy Petre.

Captain Love went home and brooded over the dainties of life. He read some of the verses from the little book (which, by this time, had made a considerable stir among the fashionables) and found them flavourless. He wrote a letter to his dear friend Sir John — a very pathetic and beautiful production — and then committed it to the flames. He wondered how Dorothy would feel if he were shot or run through in the duel; and again, how such a fate to Mr. Creighton would affect her. He strove to call up the lady's image to his mind's eye; and, succeeding, he viewed it with indifference.

"What am I?" he cried, in distress. "Nameless! folkless! hot and cold in love! Dear Lord, I am not fit to be alive! A night — and I am changed! A dream — and my heart is turned about!"

Whereupon he fell to wondering if ever, in his lost past, he had faced a fellow-being in any such an encounter as now threatened him. His reverie was broken by the light knock and hasty entrance of Sir

John Petre. With a sigh of mingled relief and shame, he arose from his chair and grasped his friend's hand. The baronet returned the greeting kindly but with a palpable air of discomfort. "I have been at Babcock's," said he, "and the place is full of talk of a disagreement between yourself and Creighton."

The captain bowed in acknowledgment.

"I was pained to hear it, Dick," continued Sir John. "I had thought that the matter was dropped for the present — in fact, if my memory serves me, I had your word to that effect — and now I find you at open warfare with the gentleman from Dorset."

The captain flushed under his friend's words and glance.

"I do not pretend to misunderstand you," he replied, "but I take exception to your view of my actions. If I gave you my word concerning a certain matter, then rest assured that I shall keep it. My trouble with Creighton is due to his damned ill-breeding, — also, it is of his own picking, — and if he were the dean of a cathedral I'd not deny him the satisfaction of a meeting."

"Do you mean that the quarrel was without premeditation on your part?" asked the baronet.

"Yes," said the captain.

"And that you follow it with no other motive save that of redressing an insult?"

"Yes," said the captain, again.

Sir John took a turn or two up and down the room. The other watched him with cool eyes; but his cheeks tingled and his lips were dry.

"Dick," said the baronet, halting before him, "this affair will cause a deal of unpleasant comment. 'Twill put an innocent girl in a very unfavourable light before the public; not to speak of her suffering if either of you fall in the encounter."

"I think you are unreasonable in thus persisting that the lady you refer to is concerned in the matter," replied the captain. "It is not as a rival," he continued, "but as a gentleman grossly insulted, that I am engaged to treat with Mr. Creighton."

Sir John bowed gravely, very pale and with set jaw, and strode from the room. The captain paced up and down, in bitter reflection.

"There goes my friend," he cried, and slapped his hands together with an oath. Though convinced that his feeling towards the baronet's sister had nothing to do with his share of the quarrel, he could not blink the fact that her shy and beautiful face, working through Creighton's jealousy, was at

the heart of the trouble. A desperate sort of anger awoke in him. He remembered stories of Dorothy's coquetry — unpleasant stories that had come to him in shreds, from no particular source. But those were of Dorset and of the few months of her residence in London before his time. But here, under his very eyes, were Merton and Creighton kept dangling, undismissed and wasting their time and money. A day ago she had been lovely enough to die for — lovely enough to kill a man for! But now he wondered that Creighton could be such a fool — and still more bitterly he wondered that he himself had been such a fool. He flung himself into his great chair and covered his face with his hands. He was aroused by Mr. Hyde prodding him in the shoulder.

"Cheer up," cried the visitor, "for you're not dead yet!"

Love sprang to his feet and displayed so haggard a visage to Hyde's startled eyes that the jovial second retreated with a skip.

"Dead!" he cried. "I would to Heaven I were dead and buried!"

But he was the first to recover self-control. Laughing faintly, he pushed a chair against his friend's legs as an invitation to be seated.

"Do not imagine that I fear either lead or steel," he said.

Mr. Hyde rubbed his shins and accepted the proffered seat.

"Maybe it is your first affair of the kind," he remarked, not unkindly. "And if so, why, 'tis no wonder you feel a trifle upset."

"First or last," replied the captain, "I am no more moved by the thought of what Mr. Creighton may do to me than if he were an old woman with a broom-stick. If I go under the sod — why, there'll be an end to the expense of maintaining an establishment, and the last page of a foolish chapter turned over. If I live — ah, there'll be less satisfaction in that, I must admit, though I've not a doubt but that some one in Dorset will be the richer for it."

"Come, come," exclaimed the other, uneasily, "you must not talk like a rascally actor on the boards. Dart and I have decided for the little meeting. I met Sir John Petre a few minutes ago and told him of it. He was good enough to say that I displayed my usual excellent taste in the choice."

"Petre is firm against it," said the captain. "And 'tis that which troubles me — for he's been a good friend to me — a friend far beyond my deserts.

But the affair must go on, though it part me from every friend in the world, unless Creighton gets down on his knees and begs my pardon. I may be landless; but I'll swallow no man's insult."

"If the lady should ask you not to fight?" inquired Hyde.

"She has nothing to do with it," replied the captain. "I judge for myself in these matters. No woman is concerned in my affairs."

CHAPTER XVI

IN THE DARK

Dawn was but a gray, cheerless thinning of gloom along the eastern horizon when Captain Love and Mr. Hyde stepped into the closed carriage which was to take them to a secluded spot of Mr. Hyde's selection. Love folded his cloak about him, for the air was bitterly cold, and closed his eyes. Shreds of slumber clung to his brain despite the exciting and desperate venture on which he was bound. Hardly realizing the peril awaiting him, he grumbled at the jolting of the carriage and looked back on his warm bed with peevish regret. Mr. Hyde, seated with a case of pistols on his knees, was deeply impressed by the other's attitude.

"You are surely a cool hand," said he. "And I'll make so bold as to venture the assertion that this is not your first affair of the kind."

"If I have fought other duels," replied the captain, fretfully but with truth, "I've clean forgot them."

"That's pushing the heroic attitude a trifle too far to be convincing," said Hyde. "A man must be either a fool or an immortal to let such matters slip his memory."

"Call me what you please," murmured the captain; "but an you love me, take the corner of that damn box out of my ribs."

By this time the carriage was out of town, rattling and jolting along over ruts of frozen mud. The gray light pressed against the windows like a fluid. The breaths of the gentlemen congealed in frosty vapour on the air. The captain drew his cloak more snugly around him. Mr. Hyde nursed the great box on his knee, in which lay the silver-mounted instruments of death, and cursed softly at the weather and his friend's unresponsive mood. The carriage stopped softly, as if at its appointed destination, the doors were snatched open on either side and masked men hurled themselves upon the unready gentlemen within.

The struggle was brief. The captain's arms were still in the folds of his cloak when he was overpowered, gagged, blindfolded and bound. The only resistance he was able to make — a vicious kick — had affected no one but the innocent Hyde, and had so suddenly deprived that indignant gentleman

of his breath that he was captured without so much as the utterance of a protest.

Captain Love felt strong hands prop him, without violence, in the seat from which he had been so unceremoniously hurled. A strong shoulder pressed him on either side. Again the carriage was set in motion, and for a few minutes rolled smartly forward. Though the captain could neither see nor hear, he was able to follow something of what was taking place by the sense of feeling. He sat very quiet (what else could he do, with his wrists tied behind his back and his ankles crossed) and struggled with his scattered wits. He had been handled softly, though surely. Not a shot had been fired. He had not received so much as a blow from a pistol-butt. What by all that was miraculous did it mean? It could not be of Buckley's planning, or he'd have received no such gentle treatment.

Suddenly the carriage came to a standstill with a violent jolt, and Captain Love felt himself being lifted from the seat, and carried a short distance. He could hear nothing, so ponderous was the cloth that had been tied around his head to blindfold him. But his nose was clear. He caught the odour of tobacco smoke and gin-toddy. Then he was laid gently on a bed, the gag was removed from

his jaws, and food and drink were forced on him by an unseen hand. At first he resisted these attentions; but soon realizing that if his captors wished to put an end to him they need not go to the trouble of poisoning his liquor, and feeling honestly hungry, he swallowed all that was put to his lips. Feeling much better for the strange repast (though he was no great admirer of the Holland drink), he asked to be set up a little higher against the pillows and to have his hands tied in front instead of behind. Being obliged in both requests, he took heart.

"I have ten pounds in my pocket," said he, "and will pledge myself to the payment of twenty more, without question, if you will but free me and set me on the road to Dipper's Common. I have an engagement — an affair of honour — and my reputation is gone if you delay me a minute longer."

He felt the fumbling of hands behind his head and straightway the bandage was pushed clear of his ears.

"Don't worry about your engagement, my lord," said a gruff voice, "for t'other gentleman be in a like plight."

He expressed his relief at the news, and his wonder at the meaning of the whole affair. Highway-

men, as he knew to his sorrow, were not always so considerate in the treatment of their victims.

"Then what d'ye want of me, if not the money?" he asked.

He heard the murmurings of a stealthy conversation, and presently the same gruff voice replied that the money was the thing, after all. Immediately a hand went through his pockets and relieved him of the ten pounds and his big, gold repeater.

For many hours the captain continued to recline on a bed that he could not see, and to carry on a fragmentary conversation with his invisible jailors. He took refreshment from their hands more than once, for his own remained bound in his lap. He even smoked a pipe-full of tobacco while one of the hidden robbers held the bowl.

"I tell you frankly," said he, "that I mistrust this affair entirely and lay it to the credit of some personal grudge rather than a desire for spoils on the part of any ordinary thief and murderer of the road. I make no doubt but 'tis the boasted Dorset manner of giving and receiving satisfaction — and a damn safe one, too."

An uneasy silence followed this frank statement of suspicion. It lasted until some one clattered on

a door with a cudgel; then the captain was again gagged and deafened, lifted from the bed and thrust into a carriage. He made not the slightest movement of resistance; but inside his passive body he nursed his wrath against Mr. Creighton, having decided that the Dorset squire was, beyond question, the instigator of the cowardly business. He vowed in his heart that blood alone should wipe this indignity from his conscience — that even his dearest friend would not play such a boorish game upon him with impunity — and at that thought Sir John Petre, as he had last seen him, flashed into his mind. Could it be, he wondered, that the baronet had a hand in this postponement of the duel? He recalled, with agitation, his friend's anxiety to stop the affair and his evident displeasure at the failure of the argument he had advanced to that end. He set his teeth on the gag in his mouth. The rage of humiliation shook him like a chill of fever. Nameless he might be — nameless and landless, and with only the gaming-tables between himself and starvation — but such treatment he would not receive submissively from any man under the canopy of God's heaven.

At last the carriage came to a standstill, a door was opened, and strong arms again lifted and car-

ried the helpless captain. Hands had him by the shoulders and the feet. He marked the slow ascension of a flight of stairs, and again felt himself deposited on a bed — but this time a bed of fragrant linen sheets and yielding mattresses.

For several minutes the captain lay quiet, at full length, glad to be out of the jolting carriage and raw air. He was desperately sleepy; but it would never do for him to give up without some further effort towards winning his freedom. Though he no longer entertained any fears of violence, he felt that the sooner an end was put to his equivocal position the better for his dignity. He raised his imprisoned hands above him and openly pulled wrist against wrist. As this demonstration passed without protest, he decided that he was alone. So he strained again at the bindings, and, to his intense satisfaction, soon got free of them. In a second the bandage was snatched from his eyes and ears, and the gag of linen from his weary jaws. Then, before attending to his feet, he sat up and looked about him, fully expecting that the cowardly joke had ended in his own room. But a glance discovered to him his mistake and added bewilderment to his anger. The room upon which he looked out through a slit in the bed-curtains was as large and

as comfortable as his own, but it was not his own. A fire burned low on a wide hearth, and the pulsing light touched here and there on gilt and silver. He stared about him, with the most anxious scrutiny, and listened for some sound of life with an intensity that seemed to strain his ears. But he was rewarded by neither a sight nor a sound to denote the presence of any occupant, save himself, of the strange and shadowy room.

After a minute spent in nervous contemplation of his surroundings, the captain hastily unfastened the cord from his ankles and slipped noiselessly to the floor. At the same moment something slid from the coverlet and struck his foot. He recovered promptly from the shock, for he was not a coward, and, stooping, put his hand on his own gold repeater.

"Honest robbers," he muttered.

He turned to the bed and felt up and down the sheets until the ten pounds which those remarkable robbers had divested him of were collected under his fingers. He slipped them into a pocket without loss of time, and tiptoed cautiously from the room. The passage without was in darkness, but a lanthorn, burning in the hall below, sent a faint glimmer halfway up the staircase. The captain could hear no sound save the furtive whistling of his own breath

and the dull flutter of his own heart. With a glance over his shoulder, he set his hand to the rail and fled down the polished stairs. The doors were unfastened, and gave to his hand. In another second he was in the middle of the street, running westward as if the devil were at his heels.

At last, after futile wanderings, the captain reached the narrow portal of his own house. The whole city seemed to be either dead or sunk in slumber, and sky and pavements alike were black as the muzzle of a cannon. The captain shoved noiselessly at his door. To his surprise he found it unlocked. He entered on tiptoe and ascended the stairs without a stumble. In his bedroom the fire was out. He struck a light and soon had the candles on the mantel palely aflame. Taking one in his hand, he stepped over to see that his bed was ready for the night. He pulled back the crimson curtains — and there, gagged and bound and with a brace of pistols on his chest, lay Mr. Creighton of Dorset.

CHAPTER XVII

THE DAY AFTER

Captain Love freed his rival in short order. They faced each other with flashing eyes and set jaws.

"What in —— is the meaning of this?" cried the captain.

"By ——, do you dare ask me that?" stuttered Creighton, his tongue dry with wrath.

"Coward," cried the other, who was past reason. "Is this the way affairs of honour are settled in Dorset?"

Creighton stared blankly.

"You chicken-hearted rascal," said he, at last, "one would think that it was you who had been gagged and bound and trundled over the country, to hear you talk."

"You fool, and who else was it?" cried Love — then, in a flash of common sense, he realized that he had, but a moment past, relieved his rival from the same predicament from which he had so lately helped himself.

"I beg your pardon," he hastened to say, and briefly related his own adventures.

Mr. Creighton, looking vastly pale and shaken in the candle-light, lowered his feet to the floor and extended his hand.

"We've been made fools of," said he, "and by an intimate, I'll swear. But the thing was bungled at the end of it, and here I am in your house — and you, no doubt, were in mine."

The captain, who had the hand of his enemy in his, led him over to a chair. His heart was softened to the gentleman from the south. He produced wine, and they drank together with the sincerest expressions of friendship. The common indignity had wiped out the hostility and the insults; and not once, while they bemoaned the misadventures of the day and cursed the unknown kidnappers, did the absurdity of their present position occur to them. Here they were, knee to knee and glass to glass, pledging each the other in the loyalest terms and vowing to unearth and bring to confusion the rogue who had kept them from engaging together in mortal combat.

"And the dirty rag they thrust between my jaws," moaned Creighton, and straightway swal-

lowed more port as if to wash the taste of it from his mouth.

Captain Love would not let his late enemy go home at that uncomfortable hour. He gave him his own bed and retired, himself, to a couch in the sitting-room. In the morning the captain's servant shaved them both, and they breakfasted together most amiably. As soon as the man was out of the room they once more threshed out the incidents of the preceding day. Now the matter seemed even more outrageous and bewildering than it had the night before. Could it be that Mr. Hyde and Sir Charles Dart were at the bottom of it? Captain Love felt certain of Hyde's innocence, remembering, with a quick smile, that gentleman's anxiety to have the fight take place decently and in order. But he did not feel so sure of Sir Charles; and Creighton, for his part, did not consider Mr. Hyde to be above suspicion. They argued the matter in the most friendly spirit — and even while they argued the young footman opened the door, and Mr. Hyde stepped in.

"Well, by gad," exclaimed Mr. Hyde, staring with open amazement at the domestic scene before him. The breakfasters returned his gaze with no

lack of interest. His clothing, usually so faultless, was rumpled and pulled aslant. His wig was all awry and he carried neither sword nor walking-cane. His face was pale and unshaven, and above his left eyebrow shone a red and purple lump. Perhaps never before had the master of pedigrees paid a morning call in so sorry a plight.

"And have you, too, been trussed and blindfolded?" inquired the captain, advancing to welcome his dishevelled friend.

Mr. Hyde sputtered an oath and looked at Mr. Creighton under drooping lids.

"You may speak freely," continued Love, "for Creighton and I, you may be sure, shall listen with sympathy."

"Do you mean," cried the visitor, "that Mr. Creighton also has been dragged from pillar to post, deaf and dumb and blind, and at last tumbled into his bed to afford disrespectful amusement to his own servants."

The captain laughed.

"Mr. Creighton was tumbled into my bed," he replied, "and I into his. Otherwise, the treatment was the same."

Mr. Hyde sat down at that, evidently somewhat

mollified to hear that the outrage had not been practised on him alone. He even accepted a slice of cold beef and a pot of ale.

"I don't understand it," he said, and looked inquiringly at Creighton.

The Dorset squire shook his head and reached for the tankard.

"No more do I," said he, and went on with his eating.

He was not one to let a mystery spoil his appetite.

"It seems as if they handled you more roughly than they did either of us," remarked the captain.

Hyde put his finger very tenderly on the lump above his eye.

"'Twas the corner of the pistol-box," he said. "The d—— thing was on my knees, and when the fight began I tried to defend myself with my feet, and so hove it up against my head."

Creighton chuckled at that, though his mouth was full; but as Hyde shot an indignant glance at him he hastened to mumble that, for his own part, he'd gone under like a lamb.

"I was as helpless as this round of beef," he added, and took up the carver to replenish his plate.

Later in the day the three indignant gentlemen —

Mr. Hyde had repaired his toilet — set out for the house of Sir Charles Dart, to inquire if the Wiltshire baronet had suffered at the hands of the kidnappers. But Sir Charles had started for the country early that morning, and had left neither his address nor information concerning the date of his return, with his butler. Creighton fumbled his cane and, with an embarrassed glance at the captain, suggested a call on Sir John Petre.

"By all means," replied Love, heartily — then, catching Hyde's eye, his face hardened. He looked from one to the other, and laid a hand on Creighton's wrist.

"What mean you?" he asked; but Creighton only shook his head and took snuff.

Mr. Hyde was more at his ease.

"My dear friend," said he, "you told me that Sir John was against a certain little affair in which we three, a short time ago, were all more or less interested. A thought has come to me — a mere shadow of a thought."

"I don't believe it," exclaimed the captain, vehemently. "Petre would be the last man to meddle so between gentlemen."

Hyde turned to Creighton.

"Did our mutual friend Sir John Petre try to

dissuade you from — from the little affair I just mentioned?" he asked.

"Ay, there's no use my denying it," replied Creighton, guiltily. "Gad, he was stubborn as a hog about it."

"He would hardly go to such lengths," cried the captain. "Why, we're all his friends! Nay, he'd never carry his whim so far — a man of the world like Sir John. Come, we shall step into Babcock's and wash this unworthy suspicion from our hearts."

"Nay, captain," said Creighton, heavily. "I, for one, will step around to Sir John Petre's. By gad, now that the thing's in my mind, it itches me like a flea. We don't mismanage our friend's affairs of honour so in Dorset."

The captain hung back. He had a great fear in his heart that the outrage might be traced to the door of his best friend. If so, could even he excuse him?

"Petre is a Dorset man," he said, "so you may be sure he had no hand in that low and treacherous villainy."

"Under the circumstances," began Creighton, and blew his nose on a yellow handkerchief, like a farmer at a fair.

"Exactly," said Hyde. "Circumstances play the

very devil with the best of us. Captain, if you will be so good as to await us at Babcock's, Mr. Creighton and I, with the nicest circumspection, will look into this matter. I assure you it is our duty, as gentlemen, to do so. Honour will suffer, otherwise."

Captain Love seated himself in the lower room of that renowned place of entertainment. The wine he drank might have been water, for all the pleasure it gave him. What if this suspicion of Creighton's and Hyde's should prove true? The baronet had befriended him in a strange city; and was this good friendship to be sacrificed to a thing called honour — a thing of passion and blood, paraded by every swaggering bully in town? And what was he, who was not even sure that the name he bore was his own, to make such a disturbance in the name of honour? If Petre were responsible for the affair of the day before, then it was all for the sake of his sister. So, if he was forced to bring his friend to account, then the blame was hers. Ay, for all her shy glances and blushing cheeks, the blame was hers. It was for love of her that the Dorset squire had picked the quarrel; and (if Hyde's guess should prove correct) it was to shield her name that the meeting had been so ridiculously perverted. He

was conscious of a swift, sneering anger toward the beautiful girl.

"Oh, Lord," cried the spirit within him, "the whole world shifts under my fingers. Nothing is steadfast, nothing sure. Even the unreasonable, fine madness of love slips from me, though I masquerade under the very name of it. But a few days ago my heart was afire with a sweet and foolish courage; windmills must have tumbled before my onset; and now only my brain is alive and I suffer the most rascally treatment with no more heroic feelings than those of bitterness and regret. I face the affairs of day with my heart and brain befuddled with wisps of dream."

He called for more liquor, drank it eagerly, and sat for half an hour in an agony of doubt. His position seemed a mockery, and London a pit of torment. He forgot his luck at play, his book of verses and his unsurpassed wardrobes. He could only see himself as a loveless, landless and nameless vagrant on the verge of a quarrel with the one friend of his heart.

The captain's bitter reverie was disturbed by the entrance of Hyde and Creighton. A glance at their faces confirmed his worst fears. They approached

the table at which he sat, and leaned to him across it.

"Sir John Petre is out of town," whispered Creighton.

"They believe he has gone to his place in Dorset," said Hyde, "and they do not know when he intends to return."

"You did not see Sir John?" queried the captain, aghast.

Creighton laughed shortly and harshly and slammed his great palm on the table.

"He's gone," said he. "Run to earth. Damme, but I've half a mind to spur after him an' hunt him out of Dorset myself. If he thinks he can play such tricks on a Creighton, by h——, he's mistaken!"

Hyde nodded. "I'm a man of peace, myself," he said — "but — but this is hard to swallow."

Love got to his feet unsteadily, like one far gone in wine. His young face was white as death and he brushed his hand across his forehead.

"I must go home," he said, and passed 'round the table and through the doorway.

Creighton looked at Hyde.

"The young cock's put about," he remarked. "He's lost interest in the hunt, I'll swear, now that we're away on the true scent."

"The circumstances are unusual," replied Mr. Hyde, with a keen glance at the other.

"Damn the circumstances," cried Mr. Creighton. And then, in a lower tone, "I'm done with the breed, sir, and they couldn't call me back if they went on their bended knees. A baronet he may be — an' his father before him — but the Creightons were what they are now when a Petre twanged a bow-string."

Mr. Hyde felt that his friend from Dorset was here encroaching on his own particular field.

"They've been gentlemen since the eleventh century," he said; "and, to tell you the truth, if I were in the running for a certain lady's hand, I'd not let a little matter of family pride turn me from the contest."

His tone was very dry — though, Heaven knows, his throat was wet enough. Being of a flighty nature, he was already tiring of the abortive duel and everything connected with it.

Creighton stared at him hotly, but with a touch of uneasiness. He never felt quite sure of this bland townsman.

"Could it be managed, and a gentleman still keep his honour clean?" he asked.

Mr. Hyde laughed softly and leaned back in his seat.

"I'll tell you this much, sir," he replied. "If you call Sir Charles to account and Captain Love calls Sir John, I'll engage the lady — and she, no doubt, is the most dangerous of the trio."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE CAPTAIN'S TEMPTATION

News of the absurd termination of the affair between Captain Love and Mr. Creighton went 'round the town on every wind. Mr. Merton, that other Dorset squire who had followed Dorothy Petre to town, was in high feather over the matter. Here were both the rivals in a very laughable situation from the world's point of view, and (from what he heard) both desiring the blood of Sir John Petre in return for the indignity they had suffered. Though dull of wit, he was shrewd enough to realize that now was the time for him to winnow his own grain from the chaff of his rivals' misfortunes. So, attired in his best coat and wig, with a new small-sword at his hip, he called on Mrs. Paddington and Dorothy. Upon finding them both at home and in a flutter of excitement, he rubbed his great hands together and loosed his tongue.

"'Twas the most ridiculous affair," he said. "Here were our valiant fighting men, each in his

carriage, each with his distinguished friend beside him, rolling courageously to the scene of action. Mr. Hyde, ye'll understand, was sittin' innocent as a lamb, beside the captain, with Lord Playfair's rules of duelling in his pocket an' a box of pistols in his lap. In t'other coach Creighton was countin' the men he'd shot, on his fingers, and Charles Dart was grinnin' to himself. Well, presently the captain's coach drew up, the doors flew open an' in popped the masked highwaymen. The captain was caught like a mouse in a cornbag, but Hyde kicked one of the kidnappers in the middle afore he was tied securely. In t'other carriage, when the doors were pulled open, Sir Charles gives a yell of 'Footpads, by God,' and then, bawlin' all the time that he's fightin' like a hero, helps them put the ropes around Mr. Creighton."

"A most dishonourable affair," said Mrs. Paddington. "For my part, I feel that it would have been better to let the gentlemen shoot at one another. The late Mr. Paddington, I am sure, would never have countenanced such proceedings."

For a moment Merton was confused by this unexpected protest. He looked, in confusion, at the widow's flushed face.

"But, my dear madam," he cried, "it was a mat-

ter of duty, I do assure you. I'd have done the same myself, to protect the innocent name of a lady of my family."

"My dear sir," replied Mrs. Paddington, "three duels were fought over me, and I was none the worse — and neither were the gentlemen, for that matter."

Mr. Merton turned his gaze upon Dorothy. That young lady was seated with bent head and flushed cheeks, the picture of girlish embarrassment. Suddenly she raised her eyes shyly to her admirer's.

"Why did the gentlemen wish to quarrel?" she asked, and again averted her face.

"Ah," replied Merton, with a bow, "you must ask your mirror that question."

"Fie, sir!" exclaimed Mrs. Paddington. "Do you mean to turn the child's head?"

Poor Merton looked sincerely disconcerted at that, and blushed as vividly as did Dorothy herself. Lord, thought the simple fellow, if I could but turn both her heart and her head. He looked appealingly at the widow and blundered along with his story.

"The three men of blood," he continued, "were kept in the one cottage all day, each in a separate room. They gave up their watches and their money

— which, of course, were returned to them — without a word. They were terrified, I assure you — especially the captain and Mr. Creighton — but they managed to eat and drink, an' all the while as blind as puppies."

Mr. Merton was not as wise as he considered himself; but, after all, who is. He fairly disgusted Mrs. Paddington with his story and his satisfaction in it, and she felt both ashamed and angry that her brother should have resorted to so mean a method of stopping the affair. "The whole world knows," she argued with herself, "that men are fools about pretty faces and that the most honourable women may, all unwittingly, be the cause of the most desperate encounters" — this with a complacent memory of the havoc she herself had once wrought in the hearts and pistol-boxes of the late Reginald Paddington and his friends.

As for Mistress Dorothy, — why, the longer she gave ear to the crowing of Mr. Merton, the more her little heart inclined to the romantic and unfortunate Captain Love; and, in a lesser degree, to the solemn Mr. Creighton. Whole stanzas of the captain's verses recurred to her mind; and again she saw his face and heard his voice as on that Christmas morning when he had given her the book. But

with a caution that one would not have expected of her, she showed nothing of her feelings to Mr. Merton.

No sooner was Merton out of the house than Dorothy went to her own room, locked the door, and sat down with pen and paper. Her scholastic attainments were of the mildest type, as befitted a lady of quality of those good old days. The very sight of the ink and white paper struck discomfort to her heart; and the knowledge that the gentleman to whom she was about to write was a poet of distinction did not serve to put her any more at her ease. But at last a few lines were accomplished and the paper folded and sealed.

Captain Love was sitting by his fire, sunk in pensive meditation, when old Tom hobbled in with Mistress Dorothy's note. The first reading left him blank; the second, impatient; but soon, as he gazed at the childish signature, remorse struck at his susceptible heart. He thrust the sheet into the fire, watched it blacken and glare, and then set about the preparing of his person for the street. All the while he was arraying himself in his fine attire, he nervously planned his course of action.

"I must remember the indignity to which I have been put by the head of her family," he murmured.

"I must keep cool for both our sakes. She is beautiful, — but I must remember my word to John."

He remembered also the flavour of that immaterial dream. He looked at himself with impersonal eyes but personal knowledge, and groaned at what he saw. That, after all, the end of his quest lay not in London, he felt convinced; and a disturbing realization that his heart, as well as his name and degree, lay somewhere back of his broken memory, was strong in him.

"My God!" he said, "was ever a man left more naked to the mercies of the world?"

And now, fully attired, the captain awoke to the fact that he was a full five hours too early for the appointment.

So he walked the streets, looked in at several shops, and at last entered a quiet inn not far from the Petre house and called for a stoup of canary. Mine host knew the captain well by both sight and reputation, and so allowed himself the honour of serving him with his own hands. The captain acted very graciously; invited the good innkeeper to drink with him, and told several capital stories. But he looked frequently at his watch; and shortly after the falling of dusk he settled his hat on his wig, paid the score, and stepped into the street.

"A rare, fine gentleman," said the innkeeper, "an' sociable as a play-actor. John," he added, to an assistant, "don't forget to tell every gentleman who comes here that the great Captain Love is one of our steady customers."

The captain arrived at the door of Sir John's house sharp on the appointed minute. The street was empty. He stepped into the vestibule, paused for a second to question his heart, and then laid a hand against the door. The heavy structure of iron and oak moved at the touch, like a thing of human wit. In a trice the gentleman was within, the way closed behind him, and some one breathing quickly beside him in the dusk of the hall. He felt the brushing of light fingers on his arm.

"Was it not brave of me to bid you come?" whispered the voice of Dorothy. The captain, feeling that the bravery was his in coming like a thief in the night, could not fit his tongue to a reply. So he put his left hand across his body and gently clasped those fingers resting on his right arm.

So they continued for a few seconds in what was surely a very romantic situation; then the lady withdrew her hand.

"You think me bold — unmaidenly?" she sighed.

The captain denied the charge. No gentleman could do less — and the captain was young and a poet. Already half the sage advice he had given himself in his rooms was forgotten.

"I want you to forgive my brother," whispered Dorothy.

Under the circumstances, that did not seem hard to do.

"I am your humble servant," he murmured.

Again he felt her hand on his arm. Again he captured it; and at that moment the voice of Mrs. Paddington was heard, calling her sister. He felt the girl's slim body very close to his side, — the personification of beauty and youth touching him softly on elbow and shoulder. In a second he had drawn her to him and kissed those incomparable lips — and in another second he had opened the great door and stepped into the night.

For an hour, Captain Love paced the dark streets in a fever of remorse. He called himself many hard names, — false friend and wolf-in-the-fold among them, — for, after all, he was but an infant in the world's ways, reckoning from the date of his second birth at Nullwood Lower Farm. He called himself a weakling and a knave. He had played his

friend false, — but, still worse, he had been false to his dream!

Supperless, he turned his steps to Babcock's, and there strove to fortify his undermined self-respect with wine. At last he went up-stairs, determined to find distraction in play. The place was crowded with gentlemen but just arrived.

Among them was Lord Buckley, red of face and glassy of eye. He espied the captain immediately.

"Make way," he roared. "The fighter of bloodless battles — the kidnapped hero — is upon us."

The earl had drunk deep at supper. Now he gave himself up to loud and jeering mirth, not noticing that his pleasantry had been received in silence by the company. Presently his breath was spent. The sudden silence smote his ear like a slap from an open hand. His gaze went from one unresponsive face to another; and the false courage of his recent potations evaporated from his heart.

"Is your lordship pleased to refer to me?" inquired the captain, unsteadily. His brow and cheeks were as flushed as the earl's, and his limbs trembled. Was the emotion under which he struggled that of fear or indignation? Wiser men than Lord Buckley have mistaken the one for the other. The earl's mirthful arrogance returned to him. He had for-

gotten the outcome of his former argument with the captain.

"I'll send for Sir John Petre an' his coach, if ye put on any of your airs," he cried.

The captain stepped forward, raised a daintily gloved hand and caught the earl by the nose. Thumb and finger pinched like iron; but only for a second. Then the captain was pulled back with such violence that his hold on that most crimson point of the earl's crimson countenance gave way with an excruciatingly painful slip and twist. The nobleman roared like a bull, and snatched his sword clear of its scabbard. In a moment he was overpowered by half a dozen gentlemen and forced, weaponless, into a chair.

"I warned you that I'd pull your nose for you," said Love.

CHAPTER XIX

PARSON LOVE

For more than forty years had the Reverend John Love, M. A., looked after the spiritual conditions of the people of Dodwater, in B—shire. Two squires had found him a pillar of strength, each in his turn seeking the parson's advice on all matters. Two generations of fox-hunters had seen the parson's black coat in the front of the field. But a few old men would sometimes tell of a plague of sickness that swept through Dodwater; of the death of the parson's young wife, who was the old squire's daughter; and of two years when there was no fox-hunting in Dodwater.

Young John Love had been trained until his seventeenth year by the parson and David Frunk. Then he had ridden away, with an ensign's commission in his pocket, to return occasionally — sometimes after five years, sometimes after three — to tell stories of half the kingdoms of Europe.

One January morning the parson called David Frunk into his study.

"I'll be setting out for London to-morrow," he said.

"Lor', sir," cried David, "ye've not been a-hearin' of bad news from Master Jack."

The parson stepped over to the hearth and knocked the ashes from his long pipe into the fire.

"Ye'll remember, David," he said, "the letter I got from the captain in August?"

"Ay, sure I remembers," replied old David. "Master Jack — the capting — were wisitin' among the gentry in Northumberland an' were a-goin' up to London with one o' his friends to ax the queen to give he a easier job at sojerin' nor what he's bin havin'. An' then he were a-comin' home for Crismus."

"Yes," said the parson. He filled his pipe with tobacco from a jar on the table and lit it with a coal from the fire. When the smoke was rolling about him, he turned again to his faithful servant.

"Well," he said, "that is the last I've heard from him — and he didn't come home for Christmas."

"He were never much on the writin'," murmured David Frunk.

"Ay, he was no quill-driver," replied the parson, "but he stood always to his word. Neither heat

nor cold, hard roads nor soft, would turn him from a journey he'd set himself to."

"Ay, ye couldn't turn him with a axe, once he'd got his head sot," cried old David. "He'll get what he wants in Lunnon Town, I vum, though the queen herself tells him no."

"He was always a good son," said the parson; "and if he was a trifle headstrong, he was not reckless. I can't think, for the life of me, what's keeping him."

"Well, sir," replied David, "for all he warn't much to look at (not takin' arter his blessed mother), an' a trifle too short i' the shanks to be shapely, I'm thinkin' he had a way with him what took the women. Maybe th' queen took a fancy to 'im, sir."

The parson looked at his servant.

"David," said he, "you take a liberty in speaking so of her Majesty, — to say nothing of your master and the captain."

"Sir," cried Frunk, "I'm the last person to knowingly take a liberty with me betters. An' now I'll be off to cobble me boots an' clean me blunderbust an' borrow an extry saddle from squire."

"David, my good old friend, I intend riding to London alone," said the parson, falteringly.

The old servant shook his head and chuckled.

"Beggin' your pardin', sir," said he, "but we both goes or we both stays. What would ye be a-doin' in Lunnon without your David, I'd like to know."

At an early hour of the morning following the night of trouble at Babcock's, the Reverend John Love, M. A., and David Frunk arrived in London. They had made the journey in safety and comparative comfort, David's blunderbuss assuring them freedom from footpads during the day, and the parson's gold procuring them the best of fare and bed every night.

As they had breakfasted at the little hostel a few miles from the edge of the town, where they had spent the night, they now rode well towards the heart of things before thinking of a halt. They were mightily taken up with the scenes of life about them; and for a little while the good old parson forgot his anxiety. For a long time they walked their horses slowly, each staring to right and left in childish wonder and delight. David could not understand what the queen was about to allow such a rumpus.

"Ye an' squire wouldn't allow it up to Dodwater," he remarked.

But the parson was too intent on his novel surroundings to hear.

"Demme," exclaimed David, after a short silence, "if I didn't spy a fellow with his hand in that old gentleman's pocket. Blast me, but we wouldn't allow that up to Dodwater."

"I fear me 'tis an evil place," replied Parson Love. "An evil place, — and yet how stirring, — how full of action!"

"Ay, action enough an' to spare," muttered David. "An' I do hope Master Jack have kep' his pockets buttoned tight," he added, in a still lower voice.

"Well," said the parson presently, "we might ride the streets all day through this multitude of people, and not find the one we seek," and at that moment his glance caught the glance of a stout man in an apron standing in a doorway under a sign-board, at his left hand an arch leading into a busy courtyard.

The innkeeper bowed respectfully. The parson drew rein. The innkeeper stepped to his stirrup.

"I keep an honest house, sir," said he, "patronized by the gentlemen of the Church, the nobility and gentry. Bright rooms, sir; honest English

fare; home-brewed — and wines — why, sir, only last night I was complimented on my wine by Captain Love."

"Ho, ho!" exclaimed David Frunk, who was listening with both ears. But the parson asked very quietly who was Captain Love, though his honest face showed his emotions to the kindly eye of the innkeeper.

"Who is Captain Love?" was the reply. "Why, sir, he is the finest gentleman in London. Countesses, I hear tell, die for the love of him, an' literary gentlemen want to stab him with their quills because his rhymes be better than theirs."

At this news something of the light of hope faded from the parson's face. It seemed to him rather late in life for his son to display a talent for versification. On the other hand, he recalled a time when he himself had written rhymes; might not Jack, too, have fallen in love and recorded the pains and joys of it in poetry? And if Jack once set his hand to the making of verses, they would be good verses. Whatever he did was done with his whole heart. Five minutes later the parson and the innkeeper were seated over a flask of canary.

"Is this gentleman of whom you speak a native of London?" inquired the cleric.

"No, sir," replied the host. "He's been in town but a matter of months. He's a great soldier, I've heard, and has fought in all manner of outlandish parts."

"His name?" whispered the parson.

The innkeeper scratched his head.

"His name?" he murmured. "The name of Captain Love? Dang me, but it's slipped my noddle. Something short it be, that I know well enough. Would it be Dick, now — Dick Love?"

"Or Jack?" queried the parson, breathlessly.

"Ay, or Jack," replied the other. "Jack Love? Dick Love? Captain Jack? Captain Dick? Dang me, but I believe 'tis Jack, after all."

The old gentleman leaned across the table and grasped the astonished innkeeper by the hand.

"He's my son, — my only son," he cried. "Ah, my friend, ye've done a kindly deed this day. Now tell me where he lives. Send one of your fellows to guide me to him."

A certain Major Scott was engaged in making explanations to Captain Love, on behalf of Lord Buckley (who had meant nothing amiss, I assure you, sir, and is one of the most good-natured noblemen in England), when old Tom, eager to get back

to the kitchen to ask questions of David Frunk, ushered the vicar of Dodwater into the room and closed the door on his heels. The parson bowed low to the gentlemen at the far end of the room.

"Will you be so kind," said he, "as to tell me if Captain Love is at home?"

"At your service, sir," replied the captain, bowing.

The parson stared.

"I am Captain Love," said the poet.

The old man swayed and his ruddy face went white. Both gentlemen sprang forward to assist him; but he steadied himself against the back of a chair.

"You," he cried. "Nay, you are not my son."

"Your son," exclaimed the captain, faintly. Consternation chilled him until he was as pale and shaken as his visitor.

"I do not understand," he whispered.

"If you have a heart," replied the old man, "tell me of my son. Tell me of my only son, the brave soldier who set out for London six months ago, with a fine friend from the north."

A light flashed on the young man's brain and a weight of dread and pity sank to his heart.

"What can I tell you?" he cried. "My God, what can I tell you?"

At that moment the door opened and closed. Major Scott had departed, unnoticed by the others, to carry an amazing story to his patron the earl.

CHAPTER XX

DISCLOSURES

The Reverend John Love caught the young gentleman by the shoulders and glared into his face.

"What is the meaning of this?" he asked, with a ring of menace in his voice. "How dare you tell me, sir, that you are Captain Love?"

"My dear sir," replied the other, "if I have lied to you, — if I have harmed you, — I have done so in utter blindness. Calm yourself, I pray, and listen to me with the charity of a priest of God, and not the just anger of a father."

At that the parson sank weakly into the chair against which he had been leaning. The distress in the other's voice had cleared his heart of anger and left it open to the blackest forebodings.

"Tell me the worst," he murmured.

For a moment the captain hesitated, bending above his visitor with a stricken face. Then he drew a ring from his finger and thrust it into the other's hand; but his tongue failed him. The par-

son looked long at the ring, turning it between his fingers.

"Yes," he said, wearily, "it is my son's ring. I gave it to him myself on his sixteenth birthday. See the dint here, where the hilt of a Spanish sabre struck it ten years ago."

And suddenly, even while he spoke, tears sprang out upon the brave old face.

The sight of that paternal grief shocked the captain beyond words, assaulting his heart with physical pain. He fell on his knees before the old man, and, in broken sentences, told the story of his career since his recovery at Nullwood Lower Farm, and of all he had heard from the farmer's daughter. Then he bowed his face on his hands, his hands resting on the arm of the chair. For a long time he knelt thus, all his own affairs forgotten, listening to the half-stifled sobs of the old clergyman. At last he felt a hand on his head.

"You were Jack's friend," said the gentle voice. "Now — that Jack is gone from us — you must be a good friend to me."

Half an hour later David Frunk was sent for. He looked distrustfully at the captain when he heard the story; for his mind, being that of a peasant, worked slowly.

"Old man," said the captain, reading the other's glance, "you doubt my story now; but, before a week is passed, you will believe it. In the meantime, bear with me in charity, as your master does."

David had nothing to say to that; but the parson took the young man's hand in his.

"Lad," said he, "I trust you as one of my own blood. Did not the same hands that shattered my dreams of the future deprive you utterly of the past. As I have lost the son, so have you lost your parents and the friends of your youth. Your reunion of love will soon be accomplished — and mine in a few years' time, by the mercy of God."

David Frunk returned to the company of the captain's servants, fully convinced that, whatever his private feelings, he must display an unmoved countenance. Twice, on his way down-stairs, he had to pause and brush the tears from his eyes. So Master Jack had been killed by highwaymen, and here was a young fellow calling himself the captain, and living like a lord, and telling a story that surely no full-grown man but the parson would believe for a minute.

"It beats me, it do," he muttered, "an' what's to happen nex', I'm danged if I knows."

In the kitchen he was greeted impatiently by the inquisitive Tom.

"How d'ye find the capting?" he asked.

"Well enough, well enough," replied David, "though I'd like to see 'im a trifle shorter an' a trifle broader."

Tom and his old wife and the young footman stared at the stranger in perplexity. At last the old woman said: "Well, for my part, Master Frunk, I think the capting do have a most elegant figger."

"Ay, maybe yer right, ma'm," said David, listlessly.

The gentlemen up-stairs opened their hearts to each other. The parson told what he knew of his son's friends in the north, and promised to help the captain in the quest of his name and people. He told of the real captain's childhood, — little homely incidents glorified by the love through which they were remembered, — and of his courage and honesty; and, as the young man listened, his heart recalled the old love for his friend, though his brain was still baffled.

London held no interest now for Parson Love. He was anxious to take saddle again and distract his heart with the perils and discomforts of the

road. He wanted to see Farmer Holt; and then to ride to Northumberland and see his new friend, his poor son's intimate, restored to his birthrights. His wounded heart leaned to the unfortunate young man. He had a deep knowledge of faces, and read courage and loyalty and tenderness in the eyes and features of his host. A hundred ties seemed to bind him to this youth whom he had never seen before, whose name he did not know, and with every minute the ties strengthened.

On the captain's part, the friendship was as quick and as sincere. He felt immeasurably grateful to the old gentleman for his insight and forgiveness. He loved him for his trust. Pity and loneliness drew him to that fatherly and sympathetic heart. The stricken but gallant old priest seemed to him Hope personified, — a clue to the lost past, — a hold upon those dear, dead days, the sweetness of which sometimes touched his dreams.

The parson was for taking the road on the morrow; but the captain (we must continue to call him so for a little) begged him to wait a few days. He had affairs to settle, a few friends to bid farewell to, and servants to dismiss. He was still in doubt of the settlement of the Buckley matter, that nobleman's friend having departed in the middle of ex-

planations. He had a number of bills to pay and two extra horses, a fine carriage, and a sedan-chair to dispose of. So the parson agreed to await the captain's convenience in the matter, and David Frunk and the young footmen were sent to the inn to bring around the parson's horses and saddle-bags.

The captain went about his business sanely enough in the afternoon, paying his bills and arranging for the sale of such of his possessions as he had decided to part with. But his heart all the while was in a tumult of conflicting emotions. Now it suffered consternation that the name he had carried so gallantly — ay, and even the military title of captain — had been proved, of a surety, to no more belong to him than to any of his servants. He could think of himself as nothing but Captain Love; and though he had never fully believed that chance had given him his true name out of the shattered past, the proof of the mistake struck him like a disinheritance. Then pity for his lost and unremembered friend, and rage at the thought of his cruel death, took hold of him. Pity for the good clergyman depressed him. Shame ran over him like a wave of heat at the recollection of the scene with Dorothy, — of his broken faith with Sir John Petre. And now a wonderful joy possessed him,

and, in broad daylight, he felt something of that enchantment that had previously come to him only in his dreams. In Northumberland his past awaited him. What a great adventure was this, — to mount a horse and ride from the misfitted present, with its shame and cares and loneliness, back to the forgotten life, to childhood friends, to his own name and his own people. And what else awaited him there? Could it be that somewhere in the old life dwelt the inspiration of his dream? Could it be that the cloud lifted from his mind during his sleep? — that the disquieting sweetness that clung to him on waking from that furtive dream was the half-memory of a memory? And if a dream could stir a man like that, what of the living inspiration of it? If a half-memory, what of the Being remembered?

While passing the door of a tavern, the captain was accosted by Mr. Creighton. The gentleman from Dorset was decidedly the worse for his liquor and enjoyed a dare-devil mood very foreign to his nature. He grabbed the captain by the arm and bawled his name aloud in the street. Then — "Come in! Come in!" he cried. "I've been drinkin' to Merton — an' Merton's been drinkin' to himself. Join us, Dick, and we'll drain the cellar."

"What is it all about?" inquired the captain, allowing himself to be dragged into the tavern.

"Why, it's for the drowning of sorrow, as far as you and I are concerned," replied Creighton. "We're out of that race, my son, — and damn glad I am to know it, for 'twould have gone mightily against my pride to marry into that family after what happened t'other day."

"What the devil are you talking about?" asked the captain.

Mr. Creighton paid no attention to the question, but led the way to a table where sat Mr. Merton, flushed of face and broadly grinning.

"He has come in for Bullyham and ten thousand a year," cried Creighton, lowering himself heavily into a chair. "Look at him grin, the hero! And he's been around to Petre's — and the ladies have invited him to supper. What d'ye think of that, Dick? Are you asked to supper? No, lad, and no more am I!"

The captain congratulated Mr. Merton on his new possessions. The master of Mertonwick and Bullyham received the congratulations with a warmth that almost melted him to tears.

"I'm a lucky man, Love," he babbled. "Yesterday, mind you, I was one of the poorest gentlemen

in Dorset — and now, by gad, I'm the richest! Yesterday, or thereabouts, it was all 'the captain and Mr. Creighton' and 'Mr. Creighton and the captain,' — but to-day it is another tune, my lads! To-day it is nothing but 'Mr. Merton' — and that is worth ten thousand a year, or I'm a liar!"

"What d'ye mean?" asked Love. "Damme if I can make head nor tail of your story."

"Oh, it is simple enough," said Mr. Creighton. "Merton is drunk; but I see the truth in his eye. You will have noticed, Dick, that our worthy friend has seemed, up to the time of our last observation, to occupy third position in the friendly race in which we have all been more or less engaged of late. Yes, Dick, he was a weak third, and a fool to look at. But now he wishes you to understand that he thinks he'll win."

The captain gazed fixedly at Mr. Merton. The honest fellow looked very happy and very drunk.

"Well," said he, "I wish you luck. But be careful that you are in condition to keep your appointment."

The parson and the captain supped quietly together at home. The parson ate little and talked less; and his solicitous host's good wine was flavourless on his tongue.

The captain, understanding the old man's sorrow, kept silence concerning his own hopes and fears. When the meal was over he told his guest that he must spend a few hours at Babcock's, for there the gentlemen of the town were to be met with, and he must tell them that he had decided to go on a journey. The old man nodded, smiled kindly and returned to his meditations. The captain left him seated in a great chair by the fire, his wig on his knee, his hands clasped together and his gentle eyes bent on the dancing flames.

The captain made known his intention of going north, on family matters, to several of his acquaintances; then, with what money he could afford to risk convenient in his right-hand pocket, he went up-stairs. Play was already going merrily forward; cards at some tables, dice at others, and at some a game calling for the use of both these agents of chance. Wines and punches were being served briskly. Some wigs were awry and not a few were laid aside. Lace ruffles were turned back over wide cuffs. Whenever a candle flared and smoked, a silent-footed attendant trimmed the wick, the players not so much as raising their eyes from the business in hand. It was a scene that had begun to pall on the captain — and yet it was typical of his

whole existence in London. He would have one more night of it — and then Babcock's and its frequenters could go to the devil, for all of him. He soon found an empty table and a gentleman who was anxious to play.

The stakes were small; but fortune favoured the captain so persistently that, after a half-hour of play, a group of idlers gathered about the players. Major Scott and Lord Buckley joined the spectators; but the captain saw neither of them, for his mind and eyes were on the game. Presently, after a whispered word in Buckley's ear, the major withdrew from the quiet crowd about the table and went down-stairs. He returned shortly, accompanied by a tall and lean gentleman with a weather-beaten and cadaverous countenance. The stranger wore a serviceable rapier at his side and great spurs on the heels of his heavy jack-boots. His costume was of a military style. He elbowed his way through the rank of onlookers until he stood close behind the gentleman who was engaged in play with the captain.

"Impostor!" cried the stranger, in a harsh and penetrating voice.

Every one within ear-shot turned upon him with looks of dismay. The gentleman against whose

chair he leaned twisted around in his seat, swore, and returned to the game. But Captain Love, who sat in a half-shadow, did not lift his eyes from the cards in his hand. Not a muscle of his face moved — though, God knows, his heart leapt like a hare and then pounded in his side.

For seconds an expectant silence held the room. Men drew their breaths softly and leaned forward. Some stared at the dark-visaged stranger; others followed his penetrating gaze to the bent head of Captain Love.

"You, sir," continued the stranger. "You who call yourself Captain Love and say that you commanded the body-guard of the Sultan of Turkey. Impostor, I give you the lie."

At that the captain got quickly to his feet and leaned across the table toward his accuser. He would face the trouble like a man. At a glance he recognized the stranger as the broken mariner whom he had entertained on Christmas morning.

The recognition was mutual. The mariner turned with an oath and grasped Lord Buckley by the shoulders.

"You accursed liar!" he cried. "Hire some one else to do your dirty tricks for you, gallows bird!"

The earl pulled himself free of the great hands,

staggered, babbled a few incoherent words and fell on the floor in a fit. Nobody heeded him.

"This gentleman," added the stranger, pointing to Captain Love and turning an angry face on the company, "is an honest man and a brave one. Be careful how you lend ear to lies concerning him."

Then, with a look of disgust at the prostrate earl, he strode from the room.

CHAPTER XXI

FAREWELLS

Now the captain found himself more of a hero than ever at Babcock's. Not only his friends, but gentlemen with whom he had hitherto been on the merest terms of civility, pressed about him and congratulated him on his victory over the dishonourable earl.

The captain went home in good spirits, heartened by the kindness of the gentlemen of London and deeply touched by the loyalty displayed toward him by that strange person whom he had fed, and philosophized with, on Christmas Day. He found the parson still up and awake, seated by a cold hearth. He told him of the night's adventure; and the old man was quickened from his reverie.

"My dear lad," he said, anxiously, "we must hasten away from town. You are not safe one moment while you remain in the same place with so unprincipled an enemy."

"His fangs are drawn," replied the captain.

"Nay," returned the parson, "the fangs of such

a viper are to be feared so long as sin and poverty exist. With his gold he will buy other ruffians to compass your undoing. Let us take saddle early in the morning, for I should dearly love to return you to the arms of your people — to see in others that joy which God, in his infinite wisdom, has seen fit to withhold, for a little while, from me."

"Sir," cried the captain, impulsively, "your care is all for others, while I concern myself with but my own affairs. And even in realizing this (such an egotist am I), I must pity myself anew — for how must I have loved and honoured the son of such a father."

"Nay," replied the old man, "I love you for it. Youth is ever an egotist, and old age a nurse and busybody."

"Then, in your charity, wait for me until to-morrow," begged the young man.

"I am thinking of your danger," replied the parson.

"I have one more affair to deal with," said the captain.

"An affair?" cried the other, in a voice of agitation.

"Ay, but not of pistols or swords," replied the captain, pensively. "I would to Heaven it were."

Soon after breakfast, on the following morning, the captain walked around to the house of Sir John Petre. He could decide on no plan of action; but to act honourably he was determined. Already he felt bonds enclosing him, and his spirit struggling against them. But he would pay for the impulse of a moment with a lifelong service. He would foreswear, if need be, even the magic promise and haunting sweetness of his dream.

To his surprise, and greatly to his relief, he was told that the baronet had returned from the country. The grudge he owed that gentleman for the kidnapping affair was gone completely from his mind. He could only remember the old friendship and kindness, and his own broken word. He followed the servant into the library with timidity and awaited Sir John's entrance with a fluttering heart.

The baronet stepped in, closed the door behind him, and looked at the captain with a question in his eyes and a flush of guilt on his face. The captain returned the gaze with equal diffidence.

"Dick," said Petre, at last, "before you upbraid me, I want you to know that I am willing to beg your pardon a thousand times for — for the liberty I took with your person and for my cowardly flight

the morning after. I'll go down on my knees to you, Dick! I'll do anything but fight you!"

"John!" cried the captain, "John, it is I who should talk of kneeling for pardon."

The baronet advanced and laid his hands on the younger man's shoulders.

"Nay," he said, "having heard it long ago, from your own lips, what care I for Lord Buckley's gossip? Though a cruel fate had made you seventy times an impostor — seventy times not Captain Love — you are my friend, Dick."

The captain steadied his wits.

"So you have heard from Lord Buckley?" he asked.

"Bright and early yesterday morning," replied the baronet, "and my heart ached for both you and the old parson. Will you give me your hand, Dick?"

They shook hands warmly.

"I want you to let me help you," continued Petre. "Whatever is in my power, that I will gladly do."

For a little the captain was silent. He could not confess the indiscretion that lay so heavily on his mind without implicating the lady. That would

surely be an ungentlemanly return for the brother's friendship and the sister's tenderness. He saw, alas, that the moment had not yet come for entire frankness. Evidently the Petre family had not got news of his triumph over Buckley before the assembled gentlemen at Babcock's.

"I am going northward in a few hours," he said, "to look for my home and name. But I shall never forget your kindness, John, — never, so long as I live."

His words were sincere.

"But, John," he continued, "can you tell me if — if Dorothy — if I must give up all hope of her — her esteem?"

The anxiety in his voice was real, Heaven knows; but the baronet was in darkness as to the true cause of it. He looked compassionately at the agitated adventurer.

"You are young, Dick, and life is before you," he said. "Your true place in the world, I am sure, is a great one — greater, though not braver, than this in which you have been forced to masquerade. Keep a brave heart, Dick, for the world is full of good and beautiful women."

"What d'ye mean?" asked the captain, eagerly.

The baronet sighed, and averted his face from

the anxious gaze of his friend. He did not relish his duty.

"She had taken the exposure of your position very much to heart," he said. He drew a small, flat parcel from his pocket. "And — and she has asked me to give you back your book," he concluded.

What was the emotion that snatched the colour from the captain's cheeks as he advanced an unsteady hand for the packet? Whatever it was, it moved Sir John to renewed compassion.

"Dick," he whispered, huskily, "this scene pains me beyond words."

"I was mad ever to think of her," murmured the captain. "There are men with names — and property. Oh, yes, I was a fool; but I see my folly."

"Nay, Dick, do not take it so to heart," begged the baronet.

The captain flushed at that. Then he made a remark that puzzled his friend — and continued to puzzle him for many days.

"John," he cried, "'tis your friendship I would not lose! Your friendship, that takes no heed of riches, is the thing I value above all other things in London!"

On returning to his house, Capain Love found the broken mariner, still in the great boots, the spurs and the riding-coat of the previous night, entertaining the parson with his learning and philosophy. The captain greeted him cordially.

"I have come," said the mariner, "to warn you against Lord Buckley; and, at the same time, beg your protection. This reverend gentleman, your father, informs me that you intend starting northward within the hour. May I ride with you, sir?"

For a moment the captain hesitated.

"Surely," cried the stranger, "you cannot suspect me of still being the tool of the man whom I so lately exposed to open shame? Nay, captain, for by that act — inspired by your charity to a beggar — I have turned London into a trap of death for myself. Whatever your trouble may be, the danger is to both of us."

"Forgive me," said the captain. "God knows I owe you a debt of gratitude for your courage and honesty of last night. I shall feel honoured by your company."

"And I, also," said the good parson.

"And yet," said the stranger, bitterly, "if I had not seen in you the friend of Christmas morning,

I'd have maintained my lie with my sword, and shed, for hire, the blood of the man who fed me."

The captain looked at the parson and met his troubled regard with a faint smile.

"It was no lie, after all," he said to the big adventurer. "Buckley told the truth when he named me an impostor. I am not Captain Love. I am not the son of this forgiving and charitable gentleman. I do not know who I am."

The stranger looked from the captain to the parson, and back again. Then he laughed.

"I try not to be overparticular about the company I keep," he said.

The captain's face became bloodless in an instant. The spirit of all his ancestors — whoever they might be — shone in his eyes.

"This priest, the Reverend John Love, is not an impostor," he said; "but if you are more nice in your associates than he, you may leave us. Or, if you wish to try to regain the esteem of Lord Buckley, and earn his money, — why, I do not fear your great sword any more than one of the spits in my kitchen. Though you were as big as Hercules, I'd tell you the same, for I'm done with play-acting and lying."

"By God," cried the other, "if ever I draw sword in your presence, 'twill be in your defence. You may tell me your story or you may keep it from me; but only let me share your adventures and I'll prove a loyal follower. If you have no name in England, sir, why not cut yourself one in the west or the east? We could lead armies and set thrones tottling, you and I."

His dark, aquiline face glowed with an inner flame. His mad dreams lifted his whole personality, like a poet's inspiration. His hand went to his sword-hilt and his eyes flashed.

But the captain was not tempted.

"I have made one name for myself," said he, "and little enough of happiness has come of it; but I think the name (here he bowed gravely to the parson) has suffered as much as I. Now my quest is the name of my fathers."

The other came down to earth.

"I do not understand your position," he said; "but evidently it is very different from mine."

He looked searchingly from the parson to the captain. Their game was beyond his comprehension, but his heart was with them and his curiosity was keenly aroused.

CHAPTER XXII

AT THE WHITE HERON

THE captain rode out to the White Heron on the night before his departure northward. He said nothing of where he was going to the parson, not wishing to excite the old gentleman's anxiety; but, not knowing how many of Buckley's ruffians might be lurking in the dark streets, he left his famous gray in the stables and bestrode a small, black mare. To Buckley's cutthroats he would be known by his horse rather than by his own person; but, for all that, he kept his right hand on a pistol-butt and his eyes ever on the alert.

This visit was one for which he had but little appetite, for even now, on the eve of his departure in search of his lost past, he feared the young woman's beauty, and the pleading of her wonderful eyes, more than the clubs and pistols of all Buckley's followers. But he owed a duty — the duty of a friend — to both her and her father.

The night was starlit and frosty, and the thor-

oughfares and roads almost deserted; so the captain pressed forward at a brisk trot which brought him, shortly, to the door of the inn. Leaving the mare blanketed and in charge of a boy, he opened the door and entered without waiting for word of his arrival to be carried to his friend the innkeeper. In the public room he found only one person — a traveller, evidently, who had journeyed far, for he sat by the fire in an attitude of extreme weariness, with his great cloak still on his shoulders and the collar of it high about his face.

"Sharp weather," said the captain, hoping to get a glimpse at the stranger's face; for men who sit close to roaring fires, with their cloaks about their ears, are sometimes worth looking at — more especially so if you happen to be in the black books of gentlemen of Lord Buckley's kidney. For answer, the stranger only hunched closer to the fire. The captain gazed at him for a few seconds in silence, — then, "Where is the landlord?" he asked. At that the man by the fire turned quickly toward his questioner and as quickly back again; and Love caught a fleeting glimpse of a young, pale face, very thin, as if from hardships suffered.

"I have not seen him," he said. "I've been here but a few minutes."

At that moment Clark entered the room and advanced on the captain with an exclamation of delight and his great right hand extended.

"My dear colonel, this warms me more than hot liquor," he cried. "Rip me if it doesn't seem a year since I last set eyes on you."

The captain seized his hand and pressed it hard.

"Don't think me unmindful of your friendship," he said. "I've been busy, of late, with one thing and another — and now I have come to bid you good-bye, for I'm going home to-morrow."

"Home?" queried Clark. "Then you've found your people?"

"I'm going to look for them. I've got the secret. I know the county they live in," replied the captain.

"I am glad to hear it, for your sake an' the sake of your people; but I'm sorry for myself, an' that's a fact," said Clark. Just then he noticed the man by the hearth.

"What is your pleasure, sir?" he asked.

"I am quite comfortable, thank you," replied the stranger, without turning.

"If you want food, or drink hot or cold, pull that bell, sir, an' one of the lads will come to you," said

Clark. Then, taking Love by the elbow, "Come along with me, colonel," he whispered.

"I can stay for only a few minutes. I'm pressed for time, Joe," replied the captain. "My mare's at the door and I must hurry back to town."

"But you'll say a word to the lass. She has a heart full of gratitude for you, sir, though she is not the kind to talk much about it," said Clark.

They found the young woman in the private parlour, seated very disconsolately with a book in her lap and her eyes on the fire.

"Here is the colonel," said her father. At that, she sprang to her feet, uttering a brief, soft cry; made as if to run forward, but halted and faced him with wide eyes and flushed cheeks.

The captain halted also, looking at her with something of regret and something of shame in his young face; then, stepping forward, he lifted one of her slender hands to his lips.

"Good-bye," he said.

"Good-bye?" she repeated, in a low and questioning voice.

"I am going home," he said, without meeting her wonderful and pitiful eyes.

"The colonel is going home to his people, 'way

up north," said Clark, in a voice none too steady and of forced cheerfulness.

Then the lady pressed her hands to her eyes, shifted them to her bosom, and uttered a little cry of desolation. Clark strode toward her; but Love caught her as she swayed. Her eyes were closed and her face gleamed white as candle-wax. Dismayed, abashed, he lifted the pliant form and carried it to a couch by the wall. Clark brought brandy and water, and loosened the front of her bodice.

"Is she dead? God, what have I done?" cried the captain.

"Nay, lad, 'tis but a swoon," replied Clark. "See, the red is coming back to her cheeks. But she is not overstrong, nowadays, and that's a fact."

"What can I do for her? What can I get for her?" asked the young man, desperately. Clark looked up, his brows puckered but his eyes kind.

"Don't worry, lad; women have queer ways," he said. "Now ride along, sir, and God be with you."

The captain hesitated, gazing down at the still and beautiful face of the woman whom he had rescued from that house of horror.

"You had better go now, lad, while her eyes are shut," said the innkeeper, quietly. "For she has taken a liking to you — you saved her from a living

hell, remember — and it's a hard thing to see a friend ride away for ever."

An unreasonable shame and a keen pity gripped the captain's heart and flushed his face. With not a word at his tongue, but a jumble of unutterable thoughts in his mind, he touched the woman's forehead with his hand, hesitated for a moment with his eyes on her face, and then walked swiftly from the room. He passed, as swiftly, through the public hall, without looking to the right or left, stepped out on to the frosty road, mounted, and cantered townward.

The stranger beside the hearth had turned and looked inquiringly after the captain. When the door had closed and the ringing of the hoof-beats on the iron road had died away, he got up and pulled the bell which Clark had indicated to him a few minutes before. A boy appeared from an inner room in answer to the summons.

"Who is the gentleman who has but now ridden away?" asked the stranger.

"That was Captain Love, sir," replied the boy. The name meant nothing to the traveller, for he had but lately returned from France, and had not been in London within a space of several years.

"I want brandy, hot, with lemon and sugar," he

said; and then, as the boy turned to go, he said, "Hold a minute. Is your master's name Clark?"

"Yes, sir. Joseph Clark," replied the lad.

"Does he — does he still live here alone?"

"No, sir. The young lady is home."

"The young lady," exclaimed the stranger, facing squarely around and staring at the lad with a look of incredulity.

"Ay, sir, the young lady — the master's daughter," replied the boy, readily. "She was away a long time," he continued, "and they do say there was something queer about it — queerer than the master will allow. But she come home safe an' sound, but kind of distracted lookin', not very long ago."

"Is she — married?" asked the traveller, in a voice scarce above a whisper and thin as a wind under the eaves.

"That I couldn't say," answered the boy. "Some hold she's a widder — that she ran away to a foreign country, with a young gentleman not known in these parts, an' that he died an' left her without a penny. Some say she never wed the gentleman at all, an' that he run away from her. He'd be a fool to do that, for you'd not find her match for looks if you hunted a year."

For several seconds the stranger continued to stare at the boy as if he were fascinated. His face was colourless but his eyes shone like fire. Presently, he said, "Why d'ye stand there gossiping? Fetch the liquor, lad. Fetch the liquor."

Then he discarded his cloak, and fell to pacing the floor, back and forth in front of the fire. He was a man of about the captain's size and figure and, though his face showed the wear of sorrow and scanty living, he was evidently not more than thirty years of age. His clothes fitted him to a wish, but were shabby from long and rough usage. He displayed his own hair, which was dark and well-cared for and tied neatly. Only his great boots were new; and the linen at wrists and neck was fresh and white. In place of a fashionable small-sword or rapier, a military sabre dragged at his left side. He walked with his head erect, his eyes flashing, and his hands behind his back, clasping and unclasping.

"Can it be?" he murmured. "Dear God, can this be true? Or do I fall again? — go under the blind wheels again?"

At that moment both Clark and the boy entered, the boy carrying a tray on which stood two glasses

of steaming liquor. The stranger took one and Clark the other.

"You have travelled far, I take it, and have an appetite for the best," said Clark. "Well, sir, this is the best brandy out of France, and here's your very good health."

"And yours, landlord," returned the stranger, and drained the generous glass at a draught. "It is good liquor," he continued. "I am but just arrived from France, and there I tasted no better. Boy, bring two more such brews. We'll drink to each other again, Master Clark, for 'tis not every day that a man returns, out of bitter exile, to his own country."

"I will join you, sir, with all my heart; but you must excuse me for a minute or two," replied the innkeeper. "My daughter is but now recovered from a fainting-spell, and I must see if she requires anything."

"Is she ill?" cried the stranger, in a voice so earnest and fearful that Clark turned on him with both perplexity and suspicion in his glance. But before he could reply, the outer door flew open and, preceded by a gust of frosty air, Lord Buckley strode into the room.

"A devilish night," he cried. "Damme, but

'twould freeze the vitals of a red Indian. Bring me your best, fellow, an' bring it hot as hell — an' quick, too!"

He swaggered over to the fire, flung his cloak aside and again bawled for liquor, swearing all the while like a pirate. The stranger stood with his back to the earl and his face close to the indignant countenance of the landlord.

"D'ye know that man?" he asked, very low but cold as ice.

"No," cried Clark. "But though he were king of this island, he'd not bawl so at me, more than once. I'm a sound yeoman, I am."

"Keep cool," replied the stranger. "This is my affair."

Something in his voice silenced Clark and turned his mind quite away from his own independence and soundness.

The stranger advanced a few paces toward the earl, moving sideways a little and halting between the hearth and the door.

"This is more than I have ever hoped for," he said. "I have prayed for this. Draw your sword, you loathly beast."

"What d'ye mean?" cried Buckley. "Who are you? Why do you address me so?"

The bully was gone, and a coward stood there, gaping.

"Fool, are you blind?" retorted the stranger. "Look at me. Exert your putrid wits."

"My God!" cried the earl, and pulled out his sword in a manner of hopeless desperation, like one who has no choice but to fight the devil.

Something whistled in the air like a gust of hail, and there gleamed the stranger's great sabre, red as flame in the firelight.

"On guard," he cried, and sprang forward. By what seemed a miracle, the earl turned the first awful cut. For a few seconds, always shuffling backward, he managed to keep out of the stranger's reach and, at the same time, maintain a pretence of sword-play. Then the point of the sabre tore the breast of his coat. With a choking scream he turned and dashed around the hall, the man with the sabre close at his heels.

The earl, unable to muster courage to pause and snatch open a door, fled around and around the wide apartment; and the shabby stranger tore after him, flashing the great sabre and roaring for the other to stop and turn and give battle.

"Hold!" cried Clark. "Give over, you young devil! I'll have no murder in my house."

The young man paid no heed, but made a slash at his flying antagonist which reached one of the fat shoulders. Before he could recover his balance from the stroke, Clark had him tight in his long arms. He struggled furiously, but hopelessly; and the earl, bleeding and choking, pulled open the door and dashed into the night.

"That is the man! Why did you let him get away?" said a voice behind Clark.

Clark turned; but the young man did not follow the earl. Instead, he let his great sabre clatter to the floor and looked at the young woman who stood on the threshold of the inner doorway. But she was looking at her father.

"What man?" asked Clark.

"The man who killed my — husband," said she. The innkeeper uttered an exclamation of amazement.

"Beatrice, Beatrice," cried the young man, softly.

The woman steadied herself against the jamb of the door. Her father, puzzled and enraged, turned upon the stranger. "And you? Who the devil are you?" he roared.

The other paid no heed. "Beatrice," he cried again. "Beatrice, have you forgotten me?"

"I thought — you were dead," whispered the woman.

The stranger's face became more haggard than ever and his eyes were dimmed with fear.

"Do you wish me dead?" he asked.

She hid her face in her hands; and Clark stood staring from one to the other.

"I paid his ruffians heavily for my life — and they took me to France where I was close guarded — and 'twas but six days ago that my exile ended," he said, his voice grown listless. And then, "if you would have it so — if the memory is dead in your heart — I will go back," he added, slowly. At that, she began to weep, leaning there with her face between her hands, and her hands pressed against the frame of the doorway. This was surely beyond any woman's fortitude! Here stood the man whom she had once loved — and whom she had long ceased to mourn. But she had learned many lessons. It would be no great matter, perhaps, to learn to care for him again. There had been a brief season — God pity her — when even the vile Buckley had not been repulsed. She had only learned to hate him for his cruelty — for his personal violence and the imprisonment he had enforced upon her. Had he

spent money for her comfort, and taken her into the world, and never struck her — well, who can say? But she hated him now; and she had seen him escape from just punishment. And the fine captain had also ridden away. To the very last, she had hoped for another turn to that affair. She had made her plans when they had first ridden into London together; but Fate — or something stronger — had played against her. Her bitter reflections were disturbed by the shabby young man — her husband.

"For God's sake, tell me! Have pity on me!" he cried.

"I must make the best of things as they are," she thought. "I loved him, once. Perhaps that — that sort of love — may come to me again." Oh, but she was an incomparable actor. She turned and moved toward him, her beautiful, wistful face wet with tears.

"It is for you to be merciful," she whispered, brokenly.

Ay, she could act! Sometimes she even fooled herself!

CHAPTER XXIII

"EXPECTANS EQUITO"

CAPTAIN LOVE, the parson, the big stranger who gave his name as William Chester, and old David Frunk, rode away at half-past one by the clock. The young footman had gone around the corner to spend something of his wages with convivial company, before seeking a new place. Old Tom and his wife sat alone in the basement of the house, regretting the generous captain and praying for a new tenant. Two o'clock had scarcely finished sounding from a near-by steeple when a great coach drawn by four horses rolled up the street and stopped before the door. By the time the footman was out of the rumble, old Tom was bowing on the step.

"Be this the house o' Cap'n Love?" inquired the footman.

"It were, a while back," replied Tom. "But he rid away half a hour aggo, with his fadder the passon, the old man's man David an' a big black-

visaged galoot what looked like a pirate an' the very spit o' a ragged beggar my master fed on Christmas Day."

"Rid away? Where'd he ride?" asked the footman. At that moment the door of the coach, with its arms surmounted by an earl's coronet, swung open and a wonderful pale-faced gentleman in a black wig and snuff-coloured coat looked out. His anxious eyes dwelt inquiringly upon the walnut countenance of old Tom.

"Is not your master at home?" he inquired.

"Axin' your lordship's parding," stammered Tom, "the capting rid off a half-hour ago, with Parson Love, me lord, who come here only yesterday hisself, a-lookin' for him."

The gentleman's brow wrinkled with perplexity.

"And was Lord Verton with them?" he asked.

"There were a fine, large, dark-faced gentleman with 'em, your lordship," replied Tom.

"Lord Verton is young and slender," said the nobleman in the carriage, with despair in his voice.

The old caretaker hobbled nearer and gazed deferentially into the other's face.

"Would your lordship be any relation to the capting?" he asked.

"No," said the gentleman, shortly. Then, after

a moment's reflection — " Why do you ask? " he inquired.

" The capting's got your lordship's eyes an' your lordship's mouth, your lordship," replied Tom. " Ay," he cried, " an' your lordship's hands."

" Impossible," exclaimed the other, " Captain Love has blue eyes — light blue. His hand is short and broad. His mouth — nay, his mouth, I think, is straighter than mine."

Old Tom eyed him shrewdly. Something of David Frunk's remark concerning the captain recurred to him. " Would Lord Verton be slim an' quick, your lordship? — always ready to give a poor man a crown an' a bully a kick — with your lordship's permission? " he asked.

" Ay, generous and brave," replied the gentleman, " with a taste for fine clothing and new books, and all that is gentle and lovely."

Tom looked steadily at the great man.

" The capting be young," he said, slowly, " an' dark of eye; he be quick of hand an' heart; he be brave as a lion; he be full of rhymes an' books; he be dressed like a prince every day o' the week."

" Then there is some mistake," said the nobleman, wearily, " for the Captain Love who is my son's friend is squarely built and past forty years

of age. Your description, my good man, is of my son — though God alone knows the meaning of that."

"Ay, your lordship," whispered Tom, "it be surely of your son, whatever his name may be. The riddle's not for the likes o' me to read, your lordship; but they has gone northward — the young gentleman who was my master, the old gentleman who came a-lookin' for his son the capting, the man-servant who looked clean mazed at what he found, an' the big, hawk-faced gentleman with a sword like a scythe."

The nobleman leaned forward and caught the old fellow by the arm. In his face shone hope, dread and bewilderment.

"For God's sake," he cried, "tell me what you mean."

Tom drew a paper from his pocket and handed it to the other. It was a deed of the captain's bedstead, silver candlesticks, table and chairs, which that generous youth had given to the old servitor as a parting remembrance.

"'Tis Harry's writing," cried the nobleman. "'Tis my son's handwriting."

For a moment strength seemed to leave him and he fell back against the cushions of the seat; where-

upon his companion, a small, dry old man, in the twinkling of an eye produced a silver flask. But the solicitous hand was pushed aside without apology; and the nobleman stepped from the coach to the cobblestones, patted old Tom on the back and cried:

" If you would have this riddle read, and that right speedily, house these cattle, an' this great, new-fangled coach, that is but little swifter than a plough, and buy me four fresh horses with saddles."

Within the half-hour the noble Earl of Northrend, the two lusty postilions and the footman sprang to their saddles and rode away. The dry, little old gentleman, who gave his name as Mr. Crinklethrope, was left behind, with the coach and road-weary horses, in the care of Tom and his dame.

" Dang it all, sir," cried Tom, as he brought up some wine which the captain had left behind, and opened it for his new guest, — " it do beat all I've ever see in eighty years come Easter. Here be two gentlemen — an' one an earl — a-lookin' for their lost sons. An' there be only one son."

" I cannot so much as guess at what the viscount has been about," remarked Mr. Crinklethrope. " And as for Captain Love — why, surely he was

able to take care of himself, even in London. Dear me, dear me, such things were not allowed when I was young. I sincerely hope his lordship will not forget us and leave me to die of homesickness in this roaring town."

Tom poured the wine, and passed the glass with a bow.

"Have no fear, sir," he said, absently. "Not even a duke would forget they fine horses an' that there great coach."

And now to return to the gentleman whose adventures and emotions are as the limbs and heart of this narrative. With his past before him (paradoxical as it may sound) he pressed eagerly on his journey. He bestrode the same long-gaited gray on which he had entered London — the beast he had taken from the highwayman. The parson jogged along at his right hand, urging his fat steed to an unusual pace, and Chester rode heavily on the left. David Frunk thumped and groaned in the rear, complaining of the frost that gnawed at his bones, the saddle that galled him, and his master's madness that depressed his soul.

"If we had stayed at home," he muttered, "like enough nothin' would hev happened to Master Jack. He'd hev come home sound an' hearty, like he's done

many a time afore. Them as rides out to seek trouble bes sure to find it. An' what's to become o' Dodwater, I'd like to know? "

The mare stumbled slightly and the jolt of her recovery rattled the old man's jaws.

" Dang it," he grumbled, " if Bess herself don't see the foolishness of it, a-chasin' off to God-knows-where with two fellows we never set eyes on afore. They be both robbers, I vum. I don't trust that young chap no farther nor Bess could kick 'im. The passon always were mighty soft wi' strangers."

In front, the three gentlemen rode knee to knee, oblivious to David Frunk's complaints and insults. The good parson was silent, deep in gloomy meditations. Saddle and spur and the chances of the road meant nothing to him now. His eyes were blind to the sights that had filled him with interest and amazement so short a time before. He did not feel the cold. He took no heed to either the frozen way beneath his horse's hoofs or the blue sky overhead. Twice he pulled off his glove and looked at the ring that had been his son's and which his son's friend had returned to him.

" Expectans equito," he read, and reflected that his long-forgotten ancestor had voiced the secret of mortal life in those two words. " ' Waiting, I ride '

— Ay, and though the body may tire and forsake the quest, the heart must ever spur along until the last road be travelled and the last adventure accomplished. And the last adventure is death. And then, by the mercy of God, waiting and riding are at an end."

The captain had a glow in his cheeks and eyes. His pulses leapt with high expectations. The cold wind was sweet in his nostrils, and the frozen world a paradise of wonderful possibilities in his vision. Who can blame him if, for the time, both the parson's sorrow and the death of his unremembered friend were forgotten? The youth of a man owes something to the inevitable fireside days to come. If he walk ever as a mourner when his boots are on his feet and his sword at his side, how are battles to be won and the world's work accomplished, and how then is he to hearten his children's children when age has him by the knees. This life may be but one stage of a long journey; then accomplish it with distinction — for will the whole be any worse if a part of it be well done. The life of a man who spends his days in lamenting the futility of this world's affairs — the life of one who sits and waits — is not worth risking for a friend or a cause. He who lives bravely dies bravely, and

steps into the Unknown with the support of a tested courage; and to those whom he leaves behind his memory is a battle-cry rather than a lamentation.

The captain rode on, with youth and hope afire in his veins. His misfortunes were forgotten. He explained his unusual position to Mr. Chester, asking no confidences in return. Then his brain busied itself with picturing the home-coming — for he entertained no doubt of being able to find his people — and his eyes were alert to recognize every house and clustered village that he had noticed on his journey from Nullwood Lower Farm to London.

Mr. Chester was almost as quiet as the parson. He had attached himself to this company to serve his own ends and partly because of his sudden liking for the captain. He had seen that their affairs were under a cloud and had jumped at the conclusion that the cloud was of their own making. Such was the natural conclusion for one of Mr. Chester's past to jump at. But now, finding them to be honest and respectable gentlemen, — the parson a real parson and the captain a model of innocence, for all his dash, — he was slightly disconcerted. He had hoped (for even a guilty conscience longs for the company of its kind) to learn that the young man had, at the very least, fleeced half the

gentlemen of London under the protection of a well-considered disguise, and that the old man had played the accomplice. To hear that they were guilty of nothing save misfortunes made his own case appear unusually hopeless and black in his mind's eye. His crimes were real crimes. He had sinned against the laws of God and man; and though he had performed a few brave and generous actions during his career, how were they to counterbalance the cruel and the dishonest in the scales of even that most merciful of all judges? If, instead of riding with two honest gentlemen on an honest quest, he were now hanging by his neck, 'twould be no more than his due. He had taken toll of the high seas and the queen's highway, and not always in the gentlest manner. He had disgraced a good name of his own and many a name to which he had taken a whim. Well, this one of Chester was new to him at any rate, and he would see how clean he could keep it. But 'tis little wonder that his mood was dark and bitter, and that he looked forward to a prolonged association with his present companions with pangs of apprehension and self-condemnation.

The travellers kept their horses to so smart a pace that, a few hours after sunset, they arrived at Nullwood Lower Farm.

CHAPTER XXIV

A BUSY NIGHT

Snow was beginning to fall in soft, whirling flakes when the four riders drew rein close to the farmhouse door. Mr. Chester leaned forward and thumped the panel with the hilt of his sword. A lattice opened above the group, and a metallic click caused David Frunk to slide from his saddle and crawl under the belly of his mare.

"Ye'll get nothin' here, me fine lads," said the voice of Farmer Holt from the upper darkness, "unless ye be after what a spark from this flint will give ye. Now be off about yer business, double-quick. This here blunderbuss be loaded like a cannon, an' if ye wants three pewter spoons an' all the buttons off me Sunday coat in yer carcasses, jes' bide where ye be until I takes a fair squint an' pulls the trigger."

"Stay your hand, good fellow," cried the captain. "We are honest travellers seeking a night's lodging."

The farmer chuckled.

"Ay, to be sure," he replied, "but if ye don't move on there'll surely be one or two honest travellers the less — an' this road a deal safer to ride along, I'll swear."

"My good friend," said the parson, "I cannot believe you to be as heartless as you sound."

"Master Holt," cried the captain, fearing that the yeoman might pull the trigger to end the argument, "if you don't let us in you'll not get the hundred pounds I owe you."

This seemed to tickle the worthy householder's sense of humour.

"Ay," said he, "a hunder pounds with a cudgel. I learned that fable when I were a toddler."

"Nay, in honest gold," replied the captain.

"Then what be yer name?" asked the farmer, leaning from the window.

"I've not found it yet," said the other, quietly, "but, as I'm on the fair road to it, I'll pay you the hundred pounds even now."

"Be ye truly that young gentleman I picked out o' the ditch?"

"Ay, truly, good William."

"An' ye hasn't learned yer name yet?"

"Nay, good friend."

"Then how'd ye come by the money? Has ye turned highwayman?"

"Enough, fellow," cried the captain. "Come down and open the door or I'll jump my horse through the thatch."

Holt was impressed.

"But I'll make so bold as to bring me blunderbust down with me," he said, as he withdrew from the window of the loft.

The snow fell thick and fast, draping the clustered horsemen in white. David Frunk, reassured, stood at his mare's head and swore he'd never been so disrespectfully treated before in all his long life. The captain dismounted and bent his ear to the door. He heard what sounded like the dragging about of a heavy piece of furniture far back in the room. Then footsteps advanced cautiously and a bolt was softly withdrawn. The footsteps retreated with less caution and more haste. Then, "Open the door," shouted the farmer from within.

"Have a care, lad," whispered the parson, trying to force himself in front of the captain; but the captain pushed the old man gently out of the way of possible danger, kicked open the door and stepped across the threshold.

The only light in the low-ceilinged kitchen came

from a tallow dip which had been placed on a stool close to the door. The captain paused, glancing uneasily from one shadowy corner to another.

"I be here behind the settle," said the voice of William Holt, "with me blunderbust pointed fair at yer honour's head. I don't mean to be unfriendly, sir, but I owes it to me wife an' darter to be a trifle forehanded in the matter o' caution. One at a time is all I ax — an' each gentleman to hold the glim to his face, so as I can take a squint at 'im."

"'Tis a low way to treat an old friend, William," said the young man, good-naturedly.

For a second he gazed over at the bulky settle; then, lifting the candlestick to a level with his face, he removed his hat. The light fell clearly on the fine-cut features and dark eyes framed in the imposing periwig, and illumined the commanding figure, the great cloak and high boots, and the gleaming sword-hilt.

"Set down the light, yer honour, an' step right in," cried William Holt. "Dang me eyes, yer lordship, but I were only jokin', an' I pray ye to forgive me. Ho! ho! but that were a fine story I telled ye about the blunderbust. Why, yer honour, I'd as lief shoot at me gran'mother, if she weren't already

dead, as p'int a weepin at yer lordship." He appeared from behind the settle, empty-handed and insufficiently attired. "I'll set the women to gettin' supper for yer honours," he continued, "an' then I'll stable the horses."

The dame and her daughter soon bustled about the room, and the four travellers, with cloaks and hats laid aside, warmed themselves at the newly lighted fire. Holt, in garments hastily donned, went out to attend to the horses.

The women were too flustered, what with pride, astonishment and consternation at thought of the late reception, to address anything but curtsies to the company. Could the wonderful gentleman in the beautiful clothes, who smiled upon them so engagingly while he warmed his back at the fire, be the poor young man whom they had nursed and fed and watched depart in a labourer's smock? The idea was overpowering. The dame remembered certain freedoms of speech and the girl certain dreams, with consternation. The gentleman must be a duke at least. To hide their embarrassment, they piled and piled the table with the contents of larder and cellar.

Suddenly the young man stepped over to the settle and produced the farmer's blunderbuss.

"I'll just put a new load in this," said he, advancing to an end of the table that was not entirely covered by food.

The women and his companions watched him in silence as he thrust a knife down the bell-mouth of the ponderous weapon. A wad of paper was soon extracted. Turning the gun muzzle down, he thumped it on the board until the pewter spoons, hammered into slugs, and the brass buttons, made their appearance. Then, taking two neat bags of canvas from under his coat, he cut them open and quickly poured their contents into the brass muzzle, and rammed home the wad of paper. He had scarce finished this curious performance when the farmer returned from his task with the horses.

The yeoman changed colour when he saw the blunderbuss in the gentleman's hands.

"William," said the captain, sternly, "I'm sorry to discover you in a lie; for what were you doing with this great piece of artillery behind the settle, if not pointing it at me?"

"Ah, sir," cried the farmer, "the times be that hard a poor man couldn't live a day without he lied now an' then."

"My friend," replied the other, "your greatest failing, I am convinced, is a lack of trust in your

fellow man. You were doubtful of my honesty to-night until you saw the excellent quality of my wig and coat. You doubted my word when I rode away from you last summer. Now what will you say when I tell you that I do not happen to have the hundred pounds I promised you in any of my pockets?"

"Why, yer lordship," said Holt, "I'll not say a word o' objection if ye'll but leave me yer pistols for a sign o' good faith. Ay, sir, yer word be good enough for me."

"My pistols!" cried the gentleman, in well-feigned anger. "Fellow, they are the best that ever were made in London. Would you ask for my pistols and let me go unarmed at the risk of my life? Maybe you'd like my wig and my hat also, Master Insolence."

Every one but the farmer stared in amazement at the captain. Holt, cautious soul, was torn between his greed and the fear that he might mortally offend this fine guest. The gentleman had surely joked when he said, outside, that he had not yet come to his own. Could a man be nameless and without estate, and yet go attired like that ancient Scriptural king in all his glory? Nay, he could not believe it.

"Noble sir," he whined, "though I be a poor man an' mightily in need o' money, I swear I were only jokin' when I axed ye to leave me the pretty pistols."

"Very good," replied the captain. "Now let us get to table."

Mr. Chester, with a diffidence that did not tally with his appearance, made as if to seat himself at the lower end of the board, with David Frunk; but the parson and the captain clutched him, each by an elbow, at the same moment. So he lifted his great sabre to his knees and squatted on a stool between them. The farmer, with something of his old self-assurance returned to him, sat down opposite the gentlemen, urged them to eat and drink, set them an example to follow in both performances, and praised the dishes and the home-brewed as if he were a guest.

The company had been about twenty minutes at table, when a sudden clatter on the outer door brought every man to his feet.

"Open to his lordship the Earl of Northrend," cried a voice.

The farmer grabbed up his blunderbuss.

"All me fine friends are visitin' me to-night,"

he said, grinning; then he roared: "Ye've a wonderful common-soundin' voice for a earl, me lad."

"I be his lordship's coachman," shouted back the unseen traveller. "Come, pull back your bolt or ye'll find your cabin about your ears."

The farmer swore and raised his great forearm to his shoulder, presenting the bell-mouthed muzzle at the door. The captain sprang forward and seized his wrist.

"Are you mad?" he cried. "D'ye take every one who comes to your door for a robber?"

"More likely a robber nor a earl," growled the farmer.

Without further argument the captain wrenched the gun from his hands and stood it against the wall. At the same moment Mr. Chester advanced boldly and unfastened and opened the door. An eddy of damp snowflakes blew into the room. The man at the threshold — a great fellow in livery — glanced quickly around the kitchen and withdrew. Immediately a tall gentleman fairly encased in the clinging white of the storm entered and confronted the farmer, Chester having retired to the hearth. He removed his hat, shook it free of its burden of snow, and returned it to his head.

"Sirrah," he cried, "I am not accustomed to being kept on the cold side of any man's door."

Catching sight of the farmer's dame, he again doffed his hat, and, this time, bowed gravely.

The dame bobbed an unsteady curtsey.

"You must teach your good man better manners, my dear," said Lord Northrend. He turned to the open door.

"Juggins, bring in the wounded robber," he ordered, "and let the others attend to the horses."

At that the big fellow in livery entered the room, carrying a full-grown man, in boots and spurs, in his arms.

Holt's anger got the better of his discretion.

"This bain't no tavern," he cried. "It be a private farmhouse."

"No tavern, say you," exclaimed the earl. "Then how comes it you keep such genteel company?"

He looked at Mr. Chester. With a slight start he turned and eyed the parson. He started forward, as if seeking some one, and his glance found out the captain, who was standing in the shadow of the chimney.

"Harry," he cried. "My God, is it Harry?"

And there he stood, his haughty face suddenly

melted to tenderness, his eyes gleaming, his hands outstretched and trembling.

The captain moved forward one hesitating step, his eyes on the other's eyes, his cheeks and lips gray as the ashes on the hearth. He tried to speak, but no sound came from him. The earl's expression changed. Fear, anger and pain moved, like shadows, across his eager visage.

"What has happened?" he cried, huskily. "Harry, Harry, are you ashamed to welcome me?"

The captain pressed his hand to his side.

"Are you my father?" he whispered. "Dear God, I cannot remember."

Then, with a faint cry, he reeled and fell into the parson's ready arms.

In an instant the kitchen became a scene of confusion. The women and Lord Northrend's coachman dashed away for water, — the women to another room, the coachman out to a well before the door. The earl and the parson bent over the unconscious youth, one unfastening the collar of his riding-coat, the other chafing the limp hands.

"The poor, poor lad," babbled the parson. "Ah, my lord, you were too sudden with him — too sharp with him."

"God knows I meant no harm, sir," replied the earl, humbly. And then: "I'm blind! I'm a fool! I do not understand," he exclaimed, in a broken whisper.

By the door, on a low stool, sat the wounded highwayman whom the coachman had carried into the room. His hands were tied. A bullet had broken his leg. Mr. Chester stood near him.

"Ah, Bill," said the prisoner, "ye've fared better nor me."

"Not so loud," whispered Chester. He stooped close to the other.

"Did you try to stop the earl and his party?" he asked.

The robber nodded.

"I thought you were living honestly," said Chester.

"I tried to," replied the fellow. "I had a little farm in Kent; but I got into trouble with the squire, an' the lawyers skinned me. I've seen pirates on land an' at sea, Bill, but never such pirates as they danged lawyers."

"Guard your tongue, lad, and I'll get you clear," whispered Chester, and opened the door to admit the coachman with a bucket of water, followed by two more of his lordship's servants.

The captain opened his eyes full upon the tender and apprehensive face of the earl.

"I remember now," he whispered. "My heart remembers."

"Ah, if your heart remembers," replied Northrend, softly; and, stooping, he pressed his lips to his son's forehead.

CHAPTER XXV

MR. CHESTER'S CHANGE OF PLANS

At last the farmhouse sank to an outer semblance of repose. The farmer and his wife and daughter ascended to the upper floor. The Earl of Northrend, Viscount Verton and Parson Love retired to the guest-chamber, — the very room in which the viscount, months before, had been nursed back to life and consciousness. Mr. Chester, David Frunk, and the wounded highwayman wrapped themselves in their cloaks and lay down by the kitchen hearth. The earl's servants sought repose in a snug room above the granary.

There was so much to tell and hear — so much of pity and joy and wonder to shake the heart — that the gentlemen in the guest-chamber kept awake until long past midnight. The parson, brave soul, had begun to tell Harry's story, to save the hero from the exertion. In the middle of it Northrend had clutched the old gentleman's hands in his and had begged him to go no further.

"You have already paid the price of our joy," he said, gently.

"And for that, I share it with you," replied the parson; but tears blinded him then, and he turned aside and hid his face in his hands.

The viscount told of many of his adventures and misadventures to his father, but said nothing of Dorothy Petre. He asked a hundred questions of his home, of his mother, of his past life, of the dead friend with whom he had set out for London — and the earl answered them all.

"But you ask nothing of Julia," said Northrend.

"Of Julia?" queried the youth, wrinkling his brow. "Then have I a sister, sir?"

"Can it be?" exclaimed the earl. "Can it be that even Julia is forgotten?"

"Is it that the fever covered my memory over, as if with a film," pondered the viscount, "or is it wiped entirely away? I have not lost my scholarship — and much trivial knowledge has remained with me." Then, speaking: "But why, sir, do you expect me to remember this lady — this Julia — when your face was lost to me, and the face of my mother, and the face of my comrade?"

The earl smiled.

"Might not the heart hold a picture, though it were broken in the mind?" he asked, softly.

"Nay," began the youth, then hesitated.

"Who is she?" he whispered, "that my heart should hold her face and forget those of my parents?"

"Who is Julia," replied the father, as if he could scarce believe the sincerity of such a question. "Who is Julia? Why, Harry, she is my ward — my old friend's daughter. There was a time, lad, — ah, you were writing vastly pretty rhymes to this same Julia not long ago."

"Rhymes!" said the viscount, blushing. "Ah, sir, I think my rhymes are scarcely to be depended upon. I made a whole book of them in London — and, alas, I promised the printers another volume."

The other's thoughts were still on the past.

"It seemed no callow loving to us," he said. "She was the toast of the county — ay, and had seen London — and you had travelled on the Continent. Then, I think, something went amiss. She lost colour and you set out for London with poor Jack."

"I cannot remember," said the viscount, with his head in his hands.

In the kitchen David Frunk slept soundly, though his couch was the floor. He could not have snored with more abandonment of repose had he been snug in Holt's own feather bed. Mr. Chester lay very still for a long time, thinking hard. Would a man be wise in changing his mode of life too suddenly — in flying completely from one extreme to another? Had he not better mend his ways gradually, testing each step and mastering each degree of virtue, so that, in the end, he could undertake the responsibilities of honest citizenship with assurance, with such an appreciation of his position as a colonel must have who has risen from the ranks? The idea pleased him; and he decided that, as for two years he had shed no blood, so, for a certain period, he would take toll from none but the rich — and that in the most gentle manner. During the next stage of improvement he would confine himself to the practice of law, for which his youthful studies had qualified him; and, in time, he would retire to private life with a competency.

David Frunk's snoring had become as inevitable as the roar of surf on a reef, when Chester at last crawled over to the wounded highwayman. After a whispered consultation, they crept to the door,

with their boots in their hands. The robber went at a snail's pace, his face twisted with pain. At the door, Chester paused, returned to the other side of the room, and, leaning across David Frunk, possessed himself of Farmer Holt's blunderbuss. A puzzled query at the threshold — a sage wag of Chester's head for reply; then a sudden icy breath across the room, a soft thud of wood on wood, and David Frunk snored on, alone, in the kitchen.

Snow lay deep on the ground, but the sky was clear.

"Hold the gun," said Chester to Bill, after the two had drawn on their boots. Then he lifted his comrade in his arms, blunderbuss and all, and carried him across the yard to the stables. Ten minutes later, two cloaked figures, mounted on horses that made no noise in the snow, passed softly behind the ricks and outbuildings and headed across country.

There was a great outcry in the morning when Farmer Holt, early astir, made the discovery that Mr. Chester and the wounded highwayman were gone, and with them the robber's steed and a fine bay gelding of the farmer's own breeding.

"Dang my eyes," he cried, "but there was a rare fine gentleman, for sure, a-ridin' with dooks

an' parsons. Why didn't he take the horse he come on, I'd like to know?"

He rolled a suspicious eye on the earl's coachman.

"I smells the reason of it," he cried — "the reason for that fine, black-faced pirate o' a gentleman to ride away on my pretty gelding an' leave his own old screw behind."

"An' what be that reason, master?" inquired the earl's coachman.

"Ye all be fine play actors," replied Holt furiously, "an' I, for one, don't believe ye have a honest man nor a gentleman among ye. Where be the hunder pounds that there young cock promised me? An' where be my pretty geldin', an' him out o' Queen Sheebee by Dook o' York?"

"Ye've a low, suspicious mind, Master What's-yer-name," replied the coachman; and, catching up a stirrup leather from the floor, he warmed the farmer's hide until the roars of that narrow-minded rustic awoke the household.

The footman and the postilion were the first to reach the scene of action; but they had scarce settled themselves on the edge of a manger to enjoy the entertainment in comfort, when Mistress Holt dashed through the doorway. For a moment

she stared in dismay. Then she cried, "Willyum Holt, what d'ye mean by gettin' into trouble with the nobleman's gentleman, when ye be dressed in your best shirt an' breeches? An' were ye a-goin' to milk they cows in them clothes?"

The coachman threw down the strap and withdrew his hand from the gaffer's collar.

"I hope I've not spoiled his fine clothin', dame," he said.

At that moment the earl, the viscount and the parson appeared in the doorway.

"What is the trouble?" inquired the earl.

"This fellow named your lordship for a highwayman, your lordship," replied the coachman.

"And did you beat him, Hipshaw, while his wife was looking on?" cried Northrend.

"Nay, sir. She but just come in," answered the servant.

Holt gave an account of the theft and the escape; and though he guarded his tongue, it was evident that he still suspected the honesty of his guests.

"Here are ten guineas to pay you for the loss of your gelding," said the earl, counting the golden coins into the fellow's hand. He was in far too thankful a frame of mind to take exception to so small a matter as the farmer's persistent rudeness.

"And the money I promised you, good William, is in your old blunderbuss," said the viscount. "I put it there last night, intending to play a harmless joke on you."

The farmer's jaw fell and his eyes protruded.

"An' that's stole, too, along with me pretty gelding," he cried — "an' here I be beat to a lather into the bargain."

The earl tossed him a full purse, and turned away.

The parson nudged the viscount.

"Was it money you poured into the great gun?" he asked.

"Ay, sir," said Harry. "And I am glad the poor devils took it," he added.

The parson nodded reflectively.

"And may God turn them from their evil ways," he murmured.

CHAPTER XXVI

JULIA

Parson Love refused to continue the journey along the road to Northumberland. He had served his dead son's friend as far as lay in his power; and now his duties at Dodwater, and the familiar faces of his own people, called to him. He longed for his narrow study, with its dusty books and shabby chair; for the little church, and for the Sunday afternoons of quiet companionship with his brother-in-law, the squire. They would narrate (as they had been doing these many years) kindly and tender anecdotes of mutual friends and relatives whom death had taken; but now, in addition, there would be little stories of Jack to tell and nod over — of his first ride to hounds, of his first scars won in battle. And thus, by two old gentlemen seated in the midst of their dreams and faith and kindly memories, death would seem no more than a present separation, to be mended, all in God's good time, by a short and easy journey.

So the Reverend John Love bade his friends farewell and, with the faithful but bewildered David, started back towards London. There he would meet the squire, by appointment; and thence home to Dodwater. And not a twinge of envy for the earl's joy assailed that brave old heart — nor yet a shadow of doubt as to the mercy and loving-kindness of the God whom he served.

Northrend's party pressed forward, keeping to their saddles all day and passing each night in whatever house or inn lay nearest to hand at sunset.

It was on a Sunday morning that they skirted the quiet village, by way of muddy lanes, and won to the great park. The viscount looked about him with eager eyes. He contemplated the ranked oaks and clustered firs, the sturdy green of holly in the underbrush and the dappled sides of the deer in the coverts — and tears dimmed his sight.

"I can remember none of it," he whispered to his father.

For answer, the earl put out his hand and patted the knee so close to his own, for they rode stirrup to stirrup.

The weather had softened, and sodden leaves lay bare underfoot, and a whisper of trickling

waters sounded from the timber on either side of the way. Small, sombre-hued birds chirped and flitted through the high tracery of branches. At last they came in sight of a wing of the great house. With every step, the woods receded from either hand and the view widened, and presently they saw the whole of that noble and time-stained mansion, set commandingly above its terraced gardens. At that the earl again leaned from his saddle and put out his hand. There were tears in his eyes, so strange are the ways of the emotions.

"Welcome home, lad," he said.

At the base of the lower terrace the road swept around on either side; but the home-comers, with the two gentlemen ahead, urged their horses straight up the slope of sward. Harry's eyes were on the house above. He saw nothing of the sculptured nymphs past which he rode. He gave no heed to the borders of rare shrubs scarred by the hoofs of his gray.

A groom appeared at the northern corner of the house, stared a second, and then shouted and tossed his hat in the air. A bell clanged crazily from somewhere out of sight. The great doors flew open, and a fat old man in livery waved his arms

frantically from the top of the steps, and then skipped back into the shadowy mouth of the hall.

It seemed to the viscount that all the world held its breath for the time it took him to spur up the slope of the second terrace. He was conscious of his father's great roan close at his knee, and of dogs leaping and yelping on all sides; but eyes, heart and mind were intent on the open doorway of the great house. What of his lost past would come through that wide portal, to claim and to be claimed — perhaps to touch the dead memories to life? The woman who had brought him into the world — the gentle, tender woman of whose very flesh and blood he was — would appear, and surely his heart would remember and leap with the old love. But what of the girl? — this Julia of whom his father had told him? He thought of the way his heart had warmed, so lately, to the baronet's sister and the young woman whom he had rescued from the den of murderers — and of how swiftly those infatuations had dimmed and vanished. He recalled the heart-aches, the longings and regrets, the fluttering of the pulses, inspired by the beauty and charms of these ladies. He had written verses, with sincerity of spirit and fair art, to the one,

and had risked his life for the other. True, he would risk his life for any woman — so that was no great matter! But was such a heart as his to be trusted to carry a love — even a great love — across those lost years? These things flashed through his mind like pictures, quick as light, even while he pulled his horse to a standstill at the top of the second terrace. Then a remembrance of the dream came back to him, and the doubt fled.

A stirring of life awoke in the gloom of the hall beyond the open door, and into view darted a lady of diminutive stature, in sombre, flying skirts. The small, delicate face showed the havoc of recent grief, but was now alight with joy. For a moment she hesitated on the threshold; then, followed heavily by an expostulating old dame carrying a pair of goloshes, she ran down the steps and across the wet sod in her silken slippers. The earl and the viscount flung themselves from their saddles at the same moment; but the earl was the first to catch the small lady in his arms. He held her close and whispered in her ear; and, next moment, her arms were around her son's neck and her small face hidden against his breast. The young man clasped her to him and bent his head until his lips touched her hair.

"Mother — my dear little mother," he breathed.

His heart was sure and joyful; but his eyes and his mind could not recall even so much as a hint of ever having seen this little lady before. Love and tenderness sprang, full-fledged, and his heart accepted her without fear or question.

Presently the old dame, still scolding, drew the lady from the viscount's embrace and forced the goloshes over the silken slippers.

"Ye'll catch yer death, my lady! One would think ye was old enough to know better," she muttered. "And as for Master Harry," she added, "he shouldn't be made so much of, after near breakin' our hearts with his pranks."

The viscount looked again toward the doorway of his ancestral home, eager, and yet half-afraid for what it might disclose. There, at the top of the wide steps, with the gloom of the hall framing her, stood a girl looking down at him with eyes at once dark and bright, glad and agleam with tears. And her face was the face of his dream — the matchless, wonderful face that had lurked just beyond the grasp of his vision during his waking hours, yet keeping his heart against the lures of the designing and the superficial beauties.

And so Captain Love had returned to his own. And Fate and Chance, that had thought to make him their plaything, were become no more than meaningless names whispered against the wind.

THE END.

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